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VARIETY

DEATH BECOMES HIM

How Penn Badgley's sexy, **problematic** serial **killer** **got** away with murder and made '**You**' a **global** smash

BY
KATE
AURTHUR

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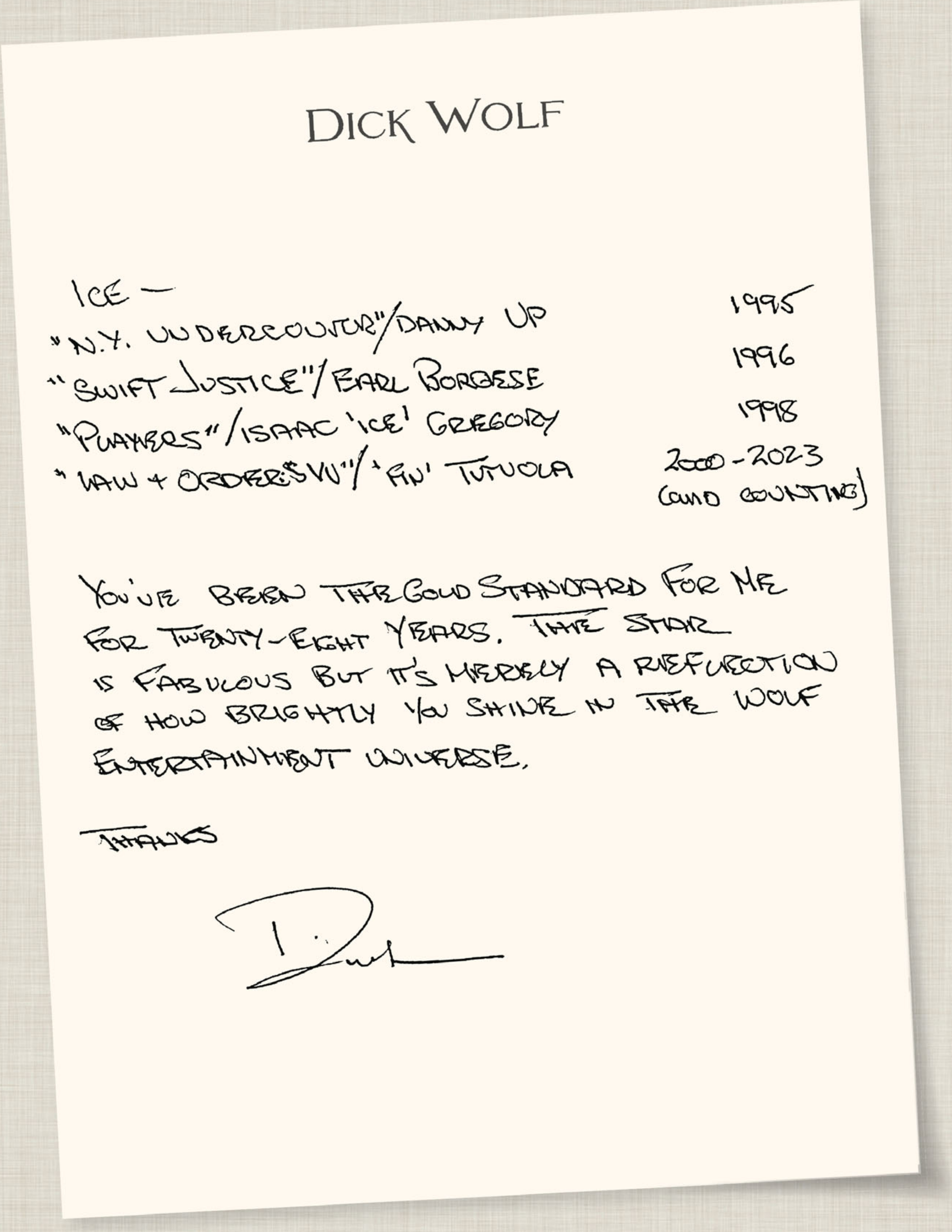

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Hello, Upper East Siders. Stay Away From Joe Goldberg's Cage.

CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Cynthia Littleton

Ramin Setoodeh

Dexter won Emmys for Showtime, and Hannibal devoured his victims on NBC. But TV's latest superstar serial murderer is making a killing on streaming. In its fourth season, the crime thriller "You," anchored by Penn Badgley's riveting work as Joe Goldberg, continues to top Netflix viewership every time a new batch of episodes drops.

Badgley has been a presence on TV for almost 20 years — since he played Dan Humphrey on the original "Gossip Girl" — and now he's pursuing new paths as a director, producer and podcaster. Over the course of several months, Badgley sat down for two interviews with our editor-at-large Kate Aurthur to discuss his initial ambivalence about playing Joe, and how he learned to finally love the character. One observation that rang painfully true: Badgley's discomfort with the ways fans tell him that they want to be kidnapped and killed by Joe. Is this satire of toxic masculinity not landing with viewers who see Joe, and Badgley, as a romantic lead?

Whatever the case, there is certainly an irony in the success of "You." The show's first season premiered on Lifetime in 2018 and was quickly canceled due to abysmal ratings; people weren't finding it on the cable network known for upbeat and affirming fare. "You" only ended up with new episodes for Netflix because viewers discovered it on the streamer and made it a sensation. It's rare for TV shows to have that kind of second act, rarer still for them to go from the grips of death (in more ways than one) to global phenomenon. Credit Netflix's sweep, clever writing and Badgley's leading-man charisma. (Make sure you head to Variety.com to watch a video of him reading classic novels — from "The Great Gatsby" to "Pride and Prejudice" — in Joe's voice.)

Elsewhere in this issue, senior editor Marc Malkin landed the first in-depth interview with Leslie Grace since her starring turn in the $90 million movie "Batgirl," which was shelved by Warner Bros. Discovery for a tax write-off. In her conversation with Malkin, Grace reveals that she thinks "Batgirl" could have been saved. "There was definitely potential for a good film, in my opinion," she says. "Maybe we'll get to see clips of it later on." Unlikely, yes. But as "You" has proven, Hollywood sometimes provides surprising second chances. ⓥ

Contributors

↓

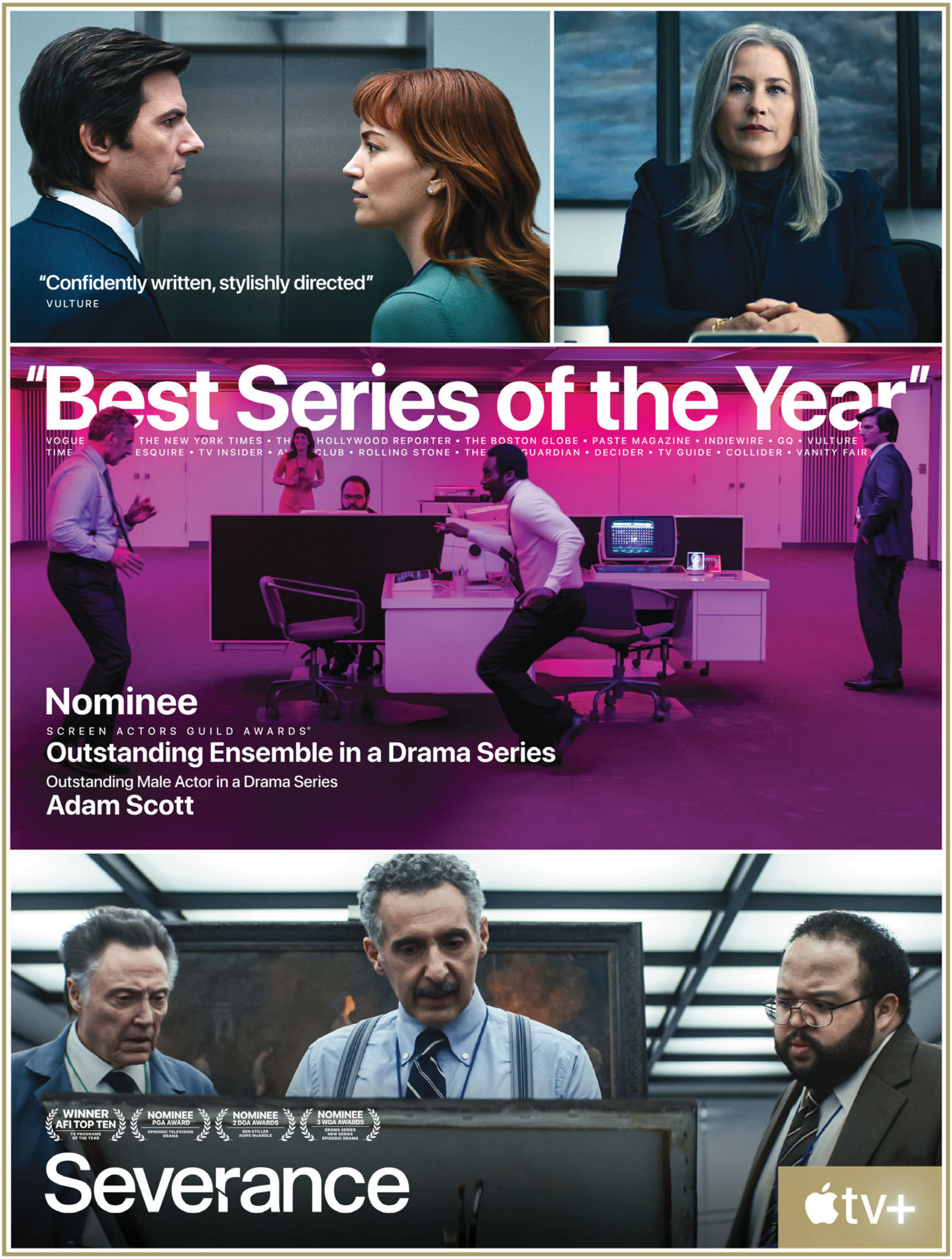
Editor-at-large **Kate Aurthur** interviewed Penn Badgley for this week's cover story twice — and luckily, lived to describe how different Badgley is from Joe Goldberg, the charismatic serial-killer character he plays on the Netflix thriller "You."

Senior music writer and chief music critic **Chris Willman** was driven to amazed profanity while reviewing Pink's 2018 show at the Forum, writing that it contained "the most holy fucking shit act of physicality I've ever seen as part of a pop show."

Senior culture and events editor **Marc Malkin** met with "Batgirl" star Leslie Grace for her first in-depth interview since the DC movie was killed by Warner Bros. Discovery. He hopes the film will be released one day.

Photographer **Heather Hazzan** captured Penn Badgley on Jan. 27 in New York City: "He embraced the vintage charm of our pre-1900s location, laying on its creaky library tables and checkered wooden floors. His calming presence brought an effortless balance to the shoot."

Littleton: Photograph by Dan Doperalski; Setoodeh: Photograph by Alexi Lubomirski; Malkin: Gilbert Flores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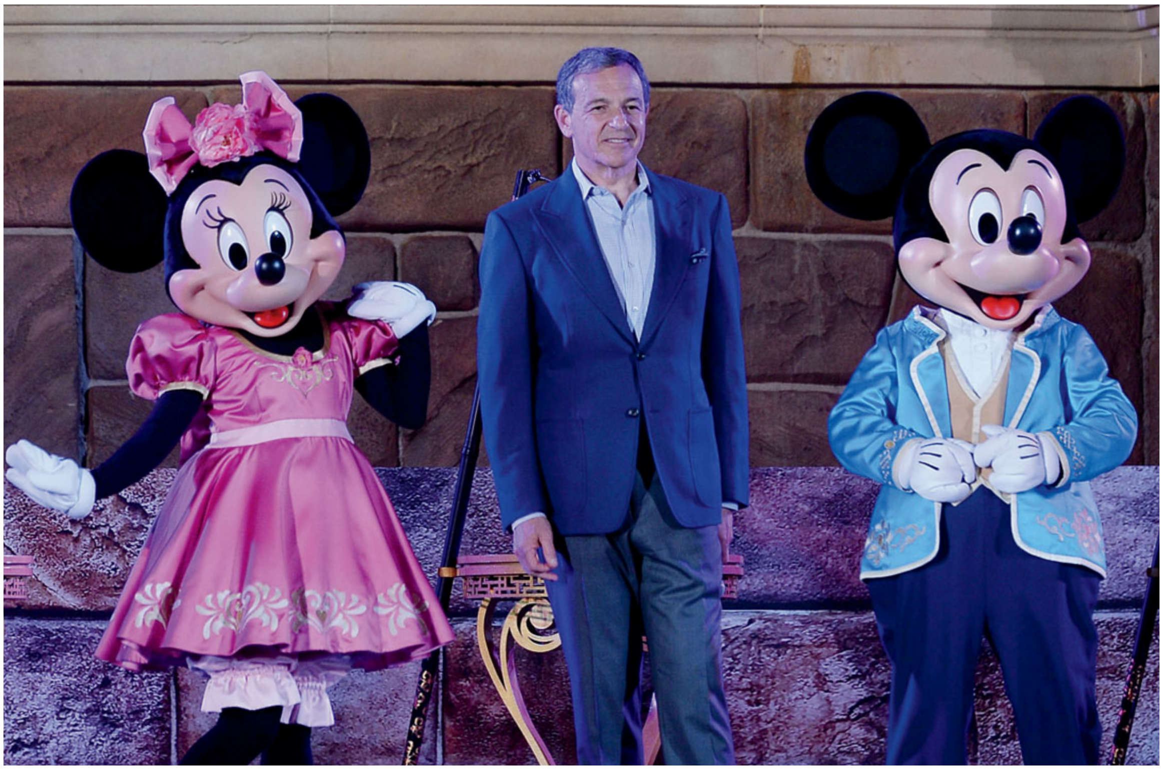
Bob Iger's Hidden Hand?

As the Disney CEO returns to power, the entertainment company's frosty relationship with China has thawed

The return of Bob Iger — here at Disney Shanghai in 2017 — as CEO has seen a Disney-China rapprochement.

By Tatiana Siegel



STR/AFP via Getty Images

On Nov. 20, Disney shocked Hollywood when it announced that Bob Iger would return as CEO after less than a year away. Two days later, Disney's "Avatar: The Way of Water" landed a coveted China release. Then, the sci-fi film received a rare release extension in China that allowed it to run through Feb. 14, enabling it to gross more than $240 million in the country.

Though Disney insiders say China's embrace of "Avatar" was unrelated to Iger's return, its success and a string of good fortune for the company has raised eyebrows at

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> “The recent approval of these big tentpole movies allows China to again say, ‘See, we let those in, giving you access to our massive market. Whover brings an apple a day to the teacher can expect that reward.’” —Chris Fenton, producer

“Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania” was one of the first Marvel movies allowed entry to China in nearly four years.

Jay Maidment/Marvel/Disney

rival studios. That’s because after seeing its Marvel releases denied entry to China for nearly four years, Disney recently announced that “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever” and “Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania” were being waved into the country. (“Avengers: Endgame” in 2019 was the last Disney Marvel movie to secure a release in the Middle Kingdom, earning $632 million there.) And if things seem cozier between Disney and China, there’s no missing that a recent “Simpsons” episode that took a shot at the country’s human rights record never appeared on Disney+ in Hong Kong. The episode’s infraction involved a bit where a virtual tour guide tells Marge: “Behold the wonders of China. Bitcoin mines, forced labor camps where children make smartphones.” That joke was enough for the episode to receive the boot.

Though a few Disney movies landed a release in China during Iger predecessor Bob Chapek’s short stint, relations between the conglomerate and Communist Party authorities grew frosty. But with the return of Iger, who once told friends that he was considering a diplomatic post in China for the Biden administration and who was the key architect in opening Disney theme parks in Shanghai and Hong Kong, a thaw appears to be afoot. A Disney spokesperson dubbed the timing of the detente as coincidental, while another studio publicist says the “Simpsons” decision was made because the episode contained elements that would violate Hong Kong’s national security law.

Hollywood is mostly breathing a sigh of relief, because the entertainment industry has been concerned about its lack of access to China’s enormous market. But not everyone sees improved relations as a positive development. “Iron Man 3” co-producer Chris Fenton, who is the author of “Feeding the Dragon: Inside the Trillion Dollar Dilemma Facing Hollywood, the NBA, & American Business,” has been a critic of the industry’s self-censorship. He says the Disney-China rapprochement might help the CCP regime more than the company’s bottom line.

“Beijing knows market leverage fosters strength, so some official likely said, ‘Hey, we haven’t given Hollywood much access lately. [If] we do that much longer, studios will stop doing what we tell them and fearing what we may,’” Fenton explains. “Beijing will lose crucial sway in how filmmakers portray China globally in their films. So the recent approval of these big tentpole movies allows China to again say, ‘See, we let those in, giving you access to our massive market. Whoever brings an apple a day to the teacher can expect that reward. If you don’t, well …’ And, voilà, Beijing’s leverage returns.”

Beyond “Avatar: The Way of Water,” the China market is undeniably warming up again as its COVID restrictions ease. The country boasted nearly $1 billion at the box office during a single week in January, led by Zhang Yimou’s “Full River Red.” As Iger attempts to right the Disney ship after it lost more than $120 billion in market cap last year, he cannot afford to turn up his nose at the Chinese market. Chasing yuan comes at a public relations expense, especially as tensions between Washington and Beijing mount following the U.S.’s shooting down of a Chinese spy balloon. Iger has weathered publicity headaches since returning, namely investor Nelson Peltz’s threat to launch a proxy battle. While Iger cleared that obstacle when Peltz announced on Feb. 9 that he was abandoning his bid, another hurdle looms. That same day, a judge denied Disney’s bid to be dropped from Kaja Sokola’s lawsuit after a nearly three-year battle over the matter. The former teen model, who is the youngest known Weinstein accuser, has one of the last standing suits involving the former mogul. She filed it and named Weinstein’s former employer Disney as a defendant after New York passed a Child Victims Act in 2019, which briefly opened a window for underage victims of sexual violence to sue. The case will now go to the discovery phase, which could dredge up embarrassing details about what Iger and former Disney CEO Michael Eisner knew about Weinstein.

“The decision rejects all of Disney’s arguments that it cannot be responsible for its negligent supervision of Harvey Weinstein,” Sokola’s attorney Kevin Mintzer says. “As a result, we believe this will be the first case in the United States in which a Weinstein survivor will be permitted to pursue, with subpoena power, the full extent of Disney’s knowledge of Harvey Weinstein’s predatory behavior.”

Then again, Iger will likely be battling tough questions on multiple fronts, particularly when it comes to China. And any repeat of the pulled “Simpsons” episode will kick-start intense scrutiny.

“Now it’s really dangerous for a studio to fix their Beijing problem because everyone outside China is watching,” Fenton says.

What Went Wrong With the Césars?

France's top film awards are under fire after snubbing women filmmakers

By Elsa Keslassy

Alice Diop received a Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival in September for her film “Saint Omer” but received no César nods.

Andreas Rentz/Getty Images

The César Awards are characterized as France's answer to the Oscars. And just like their awards show cousin halfway across the world, the Césars are embroiled in controversy after failing to nominate any women directors.

This year's Academy Awards were slammed by advocacy groups after ignoring the likes of Gina Prince-Bythewood (“The Woman King”) and Sarah Polley (“Women Talking”) in favor of an all-male contingent of auteurs. The Césars have followed suit with an all-male group of directing nominees, despite a banner year for French female filmmakers. It's one that saw directors from Alice Diop (“Saint Omer”) to Claire Denis (“Stars at Noon”) dominating the festival circuit and scoring prizes, only to come up short when the Césars unveiled their contenders on Jan. 25. The omission has sparked a debate about gender equity and sexism in the French film business, as well as social media protests emblazoned with the hashtag #CesarsSoMale, an allusion to the #OscarsSoWhite campaign that erupted in 2015 when the Academy nominated an all-white group of acting nominees.

“It's so embarrassing to see that in a country like France we've gone backward,” says Guslagie Malanda, the star of Diop's film “Saint Omer.”

Malanda was “struck” to see that no female directors were nominated at the Césars in a year when “many films directed by women got well financed and were championed by critics and even made money at box office.”

Indeed, that's what makes their omission galling to critics of the Césars. Rebecca Zlotowski's “Other People's Children” and Alice Winocour's “Paris Memories,” for instance, weren't just festival favorites, they were also among the highest-grossing local films of 2022. But of those, only Diop's and Winocour's movies earned nominations. Diop is vying for four awards, including female newcomer for Malanda, while Winocour's film earned a best actress nomination for Virginie Efira.

The best film category, meanwhile, has only one title from a female director, Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi's “Forever Young,” which premiered at Cannes. The movie, which was produced by the vice president of the César Academie, Patrick Sobelman, was plagued by scandal upon its French theatrical release in November when the movie's star, Sofiane Bennacer, was indicted on rape charges.

What's frustrating to critics of the Césars is that this year's nominations come after the César Academie, the organization behind the awards, instituted an overhaul of its leadership — this after it was criticized for giving convicted rapist Roman Polanski a best director prize in 2020. Since that time the group has achieved gender parity within its board and actively recruited women voters. Their percentage has grown from 30% in 2020 to 40.5% in 2022.

Marie-Ange Luciani, the producer of “BPM (Beats per Minute)” and a board member of the César Academie, says that among the 520 recently joined members, 69% are women. But, she says, some members failed to vote for nominations. While the César Academie counts 4,705 members, only about 67% of them cast ballots.

Sabrina Van Tassel, the director of the documentary “The State of Texas vs. Melissa” and a member of advocacy group Pour les Femmes dans les Médias, says, “Films directed by women were the ones that were most talked about internationally.” She notes that “Other People's Children” played at Sundance and “Saint Omer” won at Venice, yet both came up short in the director's race. “It makes you wonder if voters watch movies,” she says.

Some observers believe that women were left out of the category because it was reduced from seven nominees to five in an effort to shorten the show. But “Saint Omer's” Malanda has other ideas about why Diop, the director who guided her lauded performance, was snubbed.

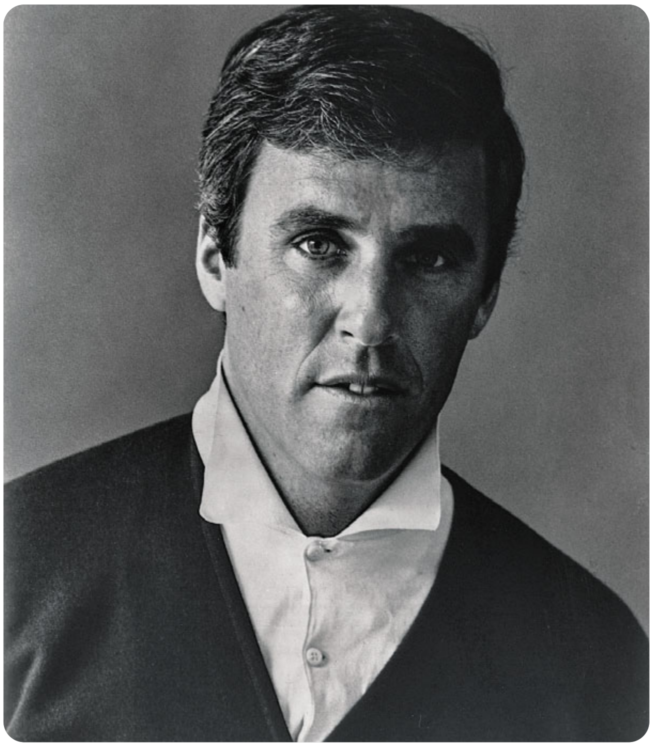
“As a woman, you always have to work twice as hard to gain recognition,” she says.

Remembered: 1928-2023

Burt Bacharach

The prolific composer broke every rule in music to craft indelible pop hits

By Jem Aswad



Burt Bacharach's compositions were complex and often downright weird.

Bettmann Archive/Getty Images

As a composer, Burt Bacharach's brilliance was in the deceptive simplicity of his work. Bacharach, who died Feb. 8 at age 94, crafted songs and scores that were sophisticated, complex and often downright weird, combining a world of influences with startling-but-smooth key and time-signature changes.

Bacharach's songs — mostly written with lyricist Hal David — have been covered by hundreds of artists, from the Carpenters to Nina Simone, Elvis Costello to the White Stripes. But his ultimate vocal instrument was the incomparable Dionne Warwick. Her arch, crisp delivery and formidable talent were a perfect match for his melodies and arrangements.

Here's a look at the genius of Bacharach in 10 songs.

DIONNE WARWICK
"Anyone Who Had a Heart" *(1963)*
This is where the magic really begins. The bridge between Bacharach's early work and his peak in the late 1960s and early '70s, it starts quietly before lilting backing vocals and sweeping orchestra join in. The song's time signature is all over the map.

DUSTY SPRINGFIELD
"I Just Don't Know What to Do With Myself" *(1964)*
A regal opening fanfare of French horns, a soaring string arrangement and booming drums create a dramatic setting for Springfield's powerhouse vocal.

SANDIE SHAW
"(There's) Always Something There to Remind Me" *(1965)*
An ultimate breakup song, Shaw deftly delivers the latticework-like melody, but bursts open on the chorus as the elaborate arrangement booms behind her.

TOM JONES
"What's New Pussycat?" *(1965)*
This novelty song is pretty ridiculous, but its strength lies in the way the arrangement embraces that ridiculousness: Underpinned by a bass drum and a tuba, it's also got accordions, a banjo-sounding guitar, calliope-esque keyboard and a blaring horn section. It's brilliant and hilarious at the same time.

CILLA BLACK
"Alfie" *(1966)*
Written for the titular film, the song was turned down by Sandie Shaw and Black. But the latter changed her mind after Bacharach agreed to fly to London and not only play piano but write the arrangement.

HERB ALPERT & THE TIJUANA BRASS
"Casino Royale" *(1967)*
Written and arranged by Bacharach, this instrumental has a sumptuous melody underpinned by an ever-changing rhythm.

JACKIE TRENT
"Make It Easy on Yourself" *(1967)*
This version of one of Bacharach's hits is an example of the sound that became one of his trademarks: a big singer and a big orchestra, offset by a trebly electric bass.

DIONNE WARWICK
"Do You Know the Way to San Jose?" *(1968)*
This classic begins as oddly as any hit in history: A four count from the bass and a bass drum is followed by a *"Woah-woah woah-woah woah-woah woah-woah-woah"* that is then repeated before the melody kicks in. Warwick's vocal skips up and down the scale and floats above the stop-start rhythm.

ARETHA FRANKLIN
"I Say a Little Prayer" *(1968)*
Franklin's peerless voice soars over a complicated chorus. Like many of Bacharach's great songs, the time signature careens all over the place.

DIONNE WARWICK
"Promises, Promises" *(1968)*
One of Bacharach's most complex and unpredictable melodies — and as always, Warwick's range, phrasing and breath control are up to the challenge. The song would be a vocalist's triathlon even without the hard stops required for a repeated word beginning with "P."

Brewing Up With the BAFTAs

Make like a native at one of these time-honored London teahouses

By Tara Weingarten

Afternoon tea with a twist at Charlotte Street Hotel

So you've been nominated for a BAFTA Award or simply received an invitation to attend the posh Feb. 19 gala — well then, hats off to you. While in London, you'll want to celebrate your good fortune with a proper spot of Da Hong Pao, a flute of festive bubbles and a fancy cress sandwich.

Or maybe you didn't snag a nomination or even an invite. But you're in London! Well then, you'll want to drown your sorrows in a proper spot of Da Hong Pao, a flute of festive bubbles and a fancy cress sandwich. See? Either way, you win.

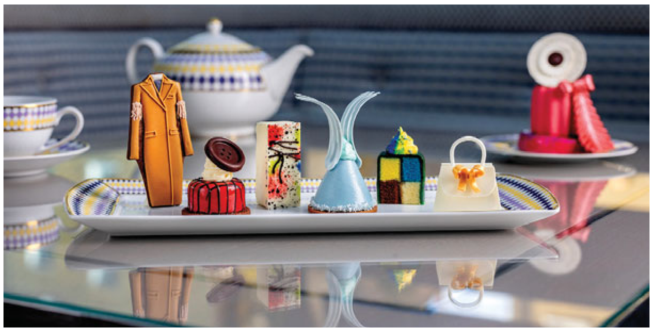
Put on your best Stella or Vivienne Westwood — for guys, make it Tom Ford — grab a Chanel bag from your closet and take a seat at one of these legendary tea emporiums to do some serious people-watching.

Charlotte Street Hotel
Take in the BAFTAs at the Charlotte Street Hotel. Bask in the glamour of the live telecast and sip a glass of Champagne from your comfy orange leather seat in the state-of-the-art screening room (25 pounds). Or enjoy a gorgeous afternoon tea or an after-BAFTA dinner in the Oscar Bar & Restaurant, a vibrant room decorated in a Hollywood art deco style. Tea is served on beautiful bespoke china designed by the hotel's co-owner and wildly talented design impresario, Kit Kemp. *Afternoon tea, 35 pounds ($42); firmdalehotels.com*

The Berkeley
The Berkeley hotel's fashion-forward Prêt-à-Portea is not to be missed. Catwalk-inspired couture cakes are decorated to look like the latest togs, handbags and shoes from de rigueur designers like Prada and Gaultier. This month's creations include a Christopher Kane floral gown interpreted as a creamy cheesecake atop a vanilla crémeux-and-crunchy sable base; a Prada camel coat imagined in a chocolate cookie with pink fur sleeves of royal icing; and an homage to gender-fluid à-la-moment designer Harris Reed via an eye-catching petit four of caramel sponge cake and Granny Smith apple compote topped with a white chocolate headpiece. Excellent celeb sightings, including frequent appearances by Fergie, the outlaw royal. *80 pounds; the-Berkeley.co.uk*

The Goring Hotel
Located in tony Belgravia, The Goring Hotel is the apex of English hushed elegance. That's why Kate, now the Princess of Wales, chose to stay here the night before her wedding. Walk through the lobby, past the hand-painted allegorical wallpaper, and that whispered refinement is evident in The Goring's afternoon tea, served either on The Veranda or in the formal dining room. Pastries are made with locally sourced seasonal fruits and served on cheerful yellow china. And a wide selection of top-tier teas has earned The Goring a Top London Afternoon Tea Award from the prestigious British Tea Council. Go for the traditional English afternoon tea, and add a wonderful glass of Bollinger Champagne for 10 pounds more. *60 pounds; thegoring.com*

Fortnum & Mason
Fortnum & Mason nods to Queen Elizabeth in its Diamond Jubilee Tea Salon, where the late monarch enjoyed tea with her daughter-in-law, Queen Consort Camilla, and her granddaughter-in-law Kate, the Princess of Wales. Located on the fourth floor of this old-world food emporium on Piccadilly, the salon is decorated in muted minty green hues. It's a charming throwback, offering a traditional tea of crustless finger sandwiches that include cucumber and minted cream cheese and Suffolk cured ham with Fortnum's English mustard. Ask for an expert tea tasting (a 6-pound surcharge), whereby a "Tearista" will give you a proper schooling on the leaves. *75 pounds; fortnumandmason.com*



Prêt-à-Portea at The Berkeley

The Heart of the Matter

A+E's Don't Skip a Beat initiative is rooted in a very personal story

By Paul Buccieri

Paul Buccieri running the Indian Wells-La Quinta half Ironman in 2021

Dave Stibor

In the summer of 2019 I was training hard for a half Ironman in Lake Placid, N.Y. I felt like I was in great shape.

The last week before a big race is a time when you're supposed to start pacing yourself and give your body more rest. But I didn't. I pushed myself. On a weekend day in mid-August, I was riding my bike down a road I had traveled many times before. The last thing I remember is that time seemed to slow down, and then everything went dark. Later, I was told a good Samaritan stopped and found me near where I went down.

There are so many "as luck would have it" moments that day. As luck would have it, a kind motorist was willing to help someone they didn't know. A hospital was nearby, and it just happened to be having a slow day; this also allowed me to meet a doctor who, as luck would have it, referred me to another specialist without delay.

I quickly learned I had a heart problem — acute coronary syndrome with 70% blocked arteries. I had to have two stents placed. I was shocked. I have always been athletic, and training has been my solace. But more than that, it was my most creative space. Now I had to not just slow down but stop. And I would have to adjust to living with cardiovascular disease. I was lucky to be alive, but it was hard to imagine what life might look like now. It was a dark period.

For me and many others, the passage of time is a driving force. It motivates me, whether it be to finish a race, ideate on a new project, close a deal or find more time with my loved ones. I have always been concerned that time would run out.

When facing hard challenges, the only way out is through, and the best way through is to be informed and awake. Cardiovascular disease is the No. 1 cause of death among women and men globally. Since this issue is so personal to me, I am determined to put faces behind the numbers. One of them is mine.

This month, A+E Networks is launching an initiative called Don't Skip a Beat, in an effort to encourage people everywhere to embrace heart health. Don't Skip a Beat will provide information about cardiovascular health and concrete details like how to spot the warning signs of heart attacks and strokes. The signs are different for men and women (women, especially women of color, face longer wait times for care and diagnosis), so being educated on the signs and the need to act quickly can save lives. We'll also raise awareness about the socioeconomic realities of cardiovascular disease and the disproportionate impact it has on people of color. It is crucial to support equal access to resources and to the level of medical treatment that I have been so fortunate to receive.

A year ago, I got the OK to do a half Ironman race, so I started training again. My time wasn't great, but that wasn't the point. I was running a different race. My purpose was to show up, stay present and finish … and I did.

When I suffered that great moment of darkness, it became a wake-up call that has changed the way I live the rest of my life. My hope is that by sharing my story, and using A+E Networks' platforms for outreach and education, I can play a small part in helping others achieve the one thing so many of us covet most: more time.

Paul Buccieri is president and chairman of A+E Networks Group. He joined the company in 2015.

Three Men and a Best Director Race

Will DGA reward the 50-year career or the hot dog fingers?

By Clayton Davis

AWARDS CIRCUIT

It's old school versus new school for best director at the DGA Awards.

Steven Spielberg's semi-autobiographical "The Fabelmans" is the culmination of more than 50 years of moviemaking. Then there's the visionary whimsy of Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, the duo behind the sci-fi comedy "Everything Everywhere All at Once." The veteran and the newcomers are the front-runners to win the top prize at the DGA ceremony, which take place on Feb. 18.

Which picture will prevail among the guild's 19,000 members? One camp esteems a long and storied career; the other points to a cinematic future that will look different but be just as enjoyable.

The Daniels and Spielberg are joined in competition by three other dynamic directors — Todd Field ("Tár"), Joseph Kosinski ("Top Gun: Maverick") and Martin McDonagh ("The Banshees of Inisherin"). But pending a stunning upset, this trio aren't expected to be serious challengers.

With their hyperimaginative tale of a Chinese laundromat owner who sets off to save the multiverse, the Daniels have gained recognition from various awards groups. "Their film is the most awarded of the year," says Mark Johnson, an editor for Awards Daily. "With the most Oscar nominations, you have to assume it's near the top."

One member of both the Academy and DGA says they're undecided on who they'll vote for but are leaning toward the Daniels. "What you can't say about that movie is it wasn't *directed*," the voter says. "There's directing all over that film."

However, the pair must overcome a couple of hurdles. The most significant is that directing teams seldom win at the DGA; only two duos — Robert Wise and Jerome Robbins for "West Side Story" (1961) and Joel Coen and Ethan Coen for "No Country for Old Men" (2007) — have achieved the feat.

Also, Hollywood has long adopted a "pay your dues" mentality. At 35 years old each, Kwan and Scheinert would be not only the youngest pair ever to win at the DGA (or the Oscars) but also the seventh-youngest director winners overall. Conservative voters may hesitate to reward the sophomore filmmakers, whose only other movie is the zany dead-body comedy "Swiss Army Man" (2016).

That creates an opening for Spielberg to capitalize on the industry narrative that he's due for late-career recognition. With "The Fabelmans," he depicts the origins of his love of celluloid while mapping out the deterioration of his parents' marriage. The vulnerability on display has resonated with voters of all guilds. "Between what he did with 'West Side Story' and the personal effort on 'Fabelmans,' there's a legacy value that's been hard to ignore," Johnson says. "And after 25 years, it's time for him to win his third Oscar."

The Daniels — Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert — could be the youngest duo to win the DGA's top prize.

Kevin Winter/Getty Images for Critics Choice Association

At the DGA, Spielberg holds the record for the most nominations and wins, at 13 and three. It also helps that he has been working the circuit far more than he did for other recent films, such as "Lincoln" (2012) and "West Side Story" (2021). That visibility and track record boosts Universal's hope of netting a win, which could lead to an Oscar moment.

Over its 75-year history, the DGA Awards have been the most reliable barometer for the Oscars' best director prize. Only eight DGA winners have failed to walk away with the Academy Award, most recently Sam Mendes ("1917"), who lost to Bong Joon Ho ("Parasite") in 2020.

Despite his BAFTA snub, if Spielberg wins, the Oscar best picture would likely come along too — as was the case with "The Departed" (2006) and overdue director Martin Scorsese. Nonetheless, the DGAs will likely mark the moment the duo that brought us subtitled talking rocks solidifies its front-runner status. My pick for the DGA is ... the Daniels.

OUR TOWN

JUST FOR VARIETY

by Marc Malkin

With Netflix's "All Quiet on the Western Front" earning nine Oscar nominations, director and co-writer **Edward Berger** is fast becoming an in-demand filmmaker. Given all the praise for "All Quiet's" battle sequences, could an action movie be next for Berger?

"I'm a big fan of action films. I love Jason Bourne. I love James Bond," Berger tells me. "One of the reasons I made 'All Quiet on the Western Front' is it's quiet in the end. There's no music. I wanted you to sort of take home that pressure sitting on your shoulders and think about it for days. Next movie I want to make, I just want to turn on the house lights and people stand up and I put on a pop song and people go, 'That was really fun. Let's go home.'"

Like a rom-com? "Maybe not that," Berger says, laughing. "Just an entertaining movie. Also I want to wash it off. I don't want to take it home forever."

•••

"Wednesday" star **Hunter Doohan** (1) insists he doesn't know what's in store for the second season of the hit Netflix series — but he's got an idea for a guest star. "I would love **Joan Cusack** because she was such a good villain as Debbie Jellinsky in 'Addams Family Values,'" the actor tells me. "Please bring Debbie back."

•••

As if **Beyoncé**'s (2) smile doesn't sparkle enough. Grill-maker to the stars **Alligator Jesus** (3) tells me he recently made not one, but two grills for Queen B. "Those have yet to be seen," he teases.

While he can't share details about the "Cuff It" singer's bejeweled teeth, Alligator Jesus reveals he worked with **Madonna** (4) in September. "She called me, and I needed to get off of Burning Man, and she got me a private jet out of the playa and straight to New York to adjust her grill for a music video," he says. Did Madge know he was at Burning Man? "She was very aware of where I was, but when you're Madonna you get what you want. ... Fill [her mouth] with diamonds, and the girl will love you forever."

•••

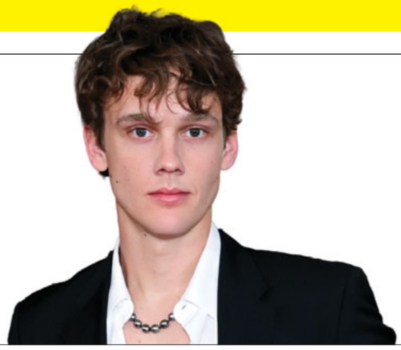
Speaking of Madonna and Beyoncé, I asked celebs during Grammys weekend who they would see in concert this year — Madonna, Beyoncé or **Taylor Swift** — if they had to pick just one. Here's what **Sharon Stone** had to say: "I would go to Madonna because it's such a rare occurrence these days and because Madonna is a legend. And I think Taylor Swift will be a legend, and I think Beyoncé is becoming a legend because she consistently makes such remarkable and extraordinary work."

•••

Miranda Lambert (5) says she'd love to work with **Bruno Mars**. Both are holding court in Las Vegas with residencies — the country star at Planet Hollywood and Mars at Park MGM. "He can just pop over," Lambert says. "Bruno, come sing with me."

Meanwhile, Lambert is readying for the April release of her book "Y'all Eat Yet? Welcome to the Pretty B*tchin' Kitchen!" The cookbook features memories of cooking with her mom, **Bev**, and best friends. "It's sort of like 'Sisterhood of the Traveling Casserole Dish,'" Lambert says, laughing. Her fave recipe is Bev's Famous Meatloaf: "It was the editor's pick in Southern Living in 2009, and she'll never stop talking about it."

(1)



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Doohan, Jesus: Photographs by Michael Buckner; Beyoncé: Mason Poole/Parkwood Media/Getty Images for Atlantis The Royal; Madonna: Kevin Mazur/Getty Images for The Recording Academy; Lambert: Axelle/Bauer-Griffin/FilmMagic

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CATANIA
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Pinocchio!!

EXPOSURE

Edited by Marc Malkin

CHEF'S DELIGHT: **Stephanie Hsu**, **Michelle Yeoh** and **Sandra Oh** celebrate Yeoh's Oscar nomination for "Everything Everywhere All at Once" at a dinner prepared by chef **Daniel Boulud** at the Mandarin Oriental Residences in Beverly Hills on Feb. 12.

River Callaway/WWD

EXPOSURE

Feb. 6

‘Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania’ Premiere

Regency Village Theatre, Westwood

Paul Rudd, who plays superhero Scott Lang (aka Ant-Man), told *Variety* that his nearly decade-long run in the Marvel Cinematic Universe is “nothing that I would have predicted or maybe really understood was even a possibility then. But it’s gratifying and humbling and exciting.” Now he’s facing off against **Jonathan Majors**’ villainous Kang the Conqueror, who’ll loom over the MCU through “Avengers: The Kang Dynasty” in 2025. “Sometimes when you’re filming a scene, you get into a rhythm. I feel like I know Scott Lang’s rhythms,” Rudd added. “And when Jonathan showed up, the beats per minute in a scene got slower; they got deliberate. … It made the entire film feel threatening and different.”

Jonathan Majors and Paul Rudd

Dylan Michael Douglas, Michael Douglas and Catherine Zeta-Jones

Evangeline Lilly and Michelle Pfeiffer

Kathryn Newton

FOR PAUL
G4P3
Vin Diesel

Louis Leterrier and Cameron Richardson

FAST & FURIOUS
Maria Menounos

Feb. 9

‘Fast X’ Trailer Premiere

L.A. Live, Los Angeles

Vin Diesel revealed to *Variety* that he wants **Robert Downey Jr.** to join the “Fast and Furious” franchise. “Without telling you too much about what happens in the future, there’s a character who is the antithesis of Dom who is promoting AI and driverless cars and a philosophy that with that goes your freedom,” Diesel said. “There is somebody that believes that’s the future, and that’s at direct odds with the Toretto mentality.” **Michelle Rodriguez** named **Matt Damon** as a dream co-star: “I fucking want Matt Damon. Matt Damon, would you be in a ‘Fast and Furious’ movie? C’mon, we got four Oscar winners, man. And you’re an Oscar winner!”

Sung Kang, Michelle Rodriguez and Ludacris

Majors/Rudd: Alberto E. Rodriguez/Getty Images for Disney; Lilly/Pfeiffer: Jesse Grant/Getty Images for Disney; Newton, Douglases/Zeta-Jones: Mark Von Holden/Variety (2); Fast X: Photographs by Michael Buckner

Ryan Phillippe at Rolling Stone

Kane Brown and Katelyn Jae Brown at the Bud Light Super Bowl Music Fest

Tiffany Haddish at NFL Honors

Lance Bass and the NFL's Roger Goodell at "A Night of Pride With GLAAD"

Feb. 10-11

Super Bowl Pre-Parties

Arizona

Hollywood's brightest stars and the sports world's biggest names headed to Arizona to get their party on before the Kansas City Chiefs and the Philadelphia Eagles battled it out in Super Bowl LVII. The festivities kicked off with NFL Commissioner **Roger Goodell** stopping by GLAAD's "A Night of Pride" event, followed by celeb-filled bashes throughout the weekend, including **Cardi B** and **Offset** headlining the Hall of Fame party and **Shaquille O'Neal** showing off his DJ skills at his annual Shaq's Fun House.

Cardi B at the Hall of Fame party

Apple's Tim Cook at the Gucci and GQ Sports party

Shaquille O'Neal at Shaq's Fun House, presented by Netspend

Rihanna at the halftime show press conference

Rob Gronkowski at Gronk Beach

Phillippe: Mike Coppola/Getty Images; Browns, Haddish, Bass/Goodell, Rihanna, Gronkowski: Christopher Polk/Variety (5); Cook: Jesse Grant/Getty Images for Gucci

America's Most Wanted

By Kate Aurthur

Photographs by Heather Hazzan

The thought of playing a highly sexualized serial killer almost stopped him from committing to Netflix's hit 'You.' But four seasons in, Penn Badgley is happy to be on a murdering spree.

Penn Badgley doesn’t actually need to be on the internet

to stoke his popularity. He’s already the internet’s boyfriend, and has been since the original “Gossip Girl” premiered in 2007.

Badgley became famous at the exact moment when the celebrity-industrial complex, fed by the toxic brew of the gossip sites TMZ and Perez Hilton, was at its most pernicious — which was the same moment that teenagers everywhere got their hands on their first iPhones. “‘Gossip Girl,’ if you think about it, wouldn’t have happened at any other time,” Badgley says. “That was the spirit of the show: It *was* Perez. It *was* TMZ.”

Badgley made it through that poisonous period intact. But now, when it comes to joining social media platforms, he is, understandably, apprehensive. Twitter used to suit Badgley best, he being a news-obsessed man of words, but that’s changed: “I can’t really spend much time on that platform anymore,” he says. Instagram, too, feels “a bit too much like standing on a stage and trying to present,” and Badgley doesn’t need that type of exposure.

TikTok, though, seems to 36-year-old Badgley like “a place for experimentation — and just to honestly have fun.” So last fall, he and his producing partner, Nava Kavelin, decided to dig in: “Basically, like a couple of old people, we were just going through TikTok, like, ‘What’s going on, on this thing?’”

(Previous spread) Fashion Director: Alex Badia; Fashion Market Editor: Emily Mercer; Fashion Market Assistant: Ari Stark; Groomer: Amy Komorowski/The Wall Group; Suit & shoes: Thom Browne; Shirt: Nili Lotan; (This page) Sweater & boots: Jil Sander; Pants: Tanner Fletcher

> “Like anybody who experiences some degree of fame and wealth, I was presented with the universal truth that not only does it not make your life better or easier, it actually can greatly complicate things, and make you quite unhappy.”
>
> —*Penn Badgley*

His first effort at a TikTok video, set to Taylor Swift’s anthem “Anti-Hero,” was a nod to Joe Goldberg, the character Badgley plays on his phenomenally popular Netflix series, “You.” Joe — who in Season 1 is a Manhattan bookstore manager broken by childhood abuse — is a charming serial killer whose charisma, physical attractiveness and baggage lead women to fall for him again and again. But then, for one reason or another, *whoops!*, Joe does it again, killing his various partners and the people close to them. (Netflix has split the 10 episodes of the current fourth season into two parts, with the first five dropping on Feb. 9 — and shooting into the streamer’s vaunted No. 1 slot — and the second batch set to drop on March 9.)

But back to that TikTok. Badgley is well aware of his earnest image, mostly projected onto him by the public because of his portrayal of Dan Humphrey, the brooding “Gossip Girl” character he played for six seasons until the show ended in 2012, and now as Joe, the devastatingly devious embodiment of toxic masculinity. And by goofily lip-syncing to Swift’s chorus — “I’m the problem, it’s me!” — he’s showing he can be funny and playful and not that serious at all.

The video went viral, with Swift anointing it in the comments with an “OMG!!!!🤩.” Headlines followed, rejoicing that Badgley had joined the TikTok generation. Even his “Gossip Girl” castmate Chace Crawford saw it. “I was dying laughing,” Crawford says. “I was a tiny bit jealous — I’m like, ‘God, Penn really knows how to work that social media.’ I’m pretty stuck in 2000. I mean, man, I don’t know how to do shit!”

Joining TikTok is a small thing. But for Badgley, it serves as an important “signifier,” he says. He used to resist his fame, but he says the character of Joe revived him as an actor. With Joe, Badgley says he’s “finally exerting the kind of performer that I am.”

Before this period, Badgley was less engaged. During “Gossip Girl,” he did a few film roles that felt like he was on the right track, with small parts in “Easy A” in 2010 and “Margin Call” the following year. He also starred as the doomed folk singer Jeff Buckley, who drowned at age 30, in the 2012 indie “Greetings From Tim Buckley.” There were years when Badgley just went through the motions. He even stopped acting for a bit in 2016, in favor of being the lead singer of the band MOTHXR.

But he feels different now, and like any savvy actor in the digital age, he’s using this spotlight to leverage new paths for himself. Badgley wants to do more as an artist — producing, directing, creating — and he’s excited about what’s next. “Things are so digital, so online,” he says. “I think you’ve got to be fully in or fully out.”

Badgley is a producer on “You,” and this season, he’s directed his first episode — the season’s penultimate, titled “She’s Not There” — which got him into the Directors Guild. Though “You” hasn’t been renewed yet, Badgley and the show’s creative team are expecting that a presumed fifth season would wrap up Joe Goldberg’s twisted story. “We’ve always had a five-season plan for the show,” says Sarah Schechter, the chairwoman of Berlanti Productions and an executive producer on “You.”

As part of being “fully in,” Badgley’s formed a production company, Ninth Mode Media, which has borne the podcast “Podcrushed.” He hosts it with Kavelin and Sophie Ansari, and their interviews with guests such as Lisa Kudrow, Conan O’Brien, Jenna Ortega (who was on “You,” and survived Joe) and Badgley’s wife, Domino Kirke-Badgley, revolve around sometimes painful excavations of adolescence and middle school memories. The “Podcrushed” TikTok account, too, has become another platform for Badgley to create viral content.

And Badgley’s plans for Ninth Mode go beyond podcasting. The company has secured funding for him to direct his first film — which he can begin whenever “You” comes to an end — and has optioned the David Sedaris story “Jamboree” to be developed as a feature.

It’s been a long road for Badgley to get here. He began acting professionally at age 12 after he and his mother moved, at his request, from outside Seattle to Los Angeles so he could pursue a career. But to say he has regrets about having been a child actor would be an understatement. His first movie credit was the 2001 queer cult film “The Fluffer,” and it serves as an illustration of his conflicted feelings. “When I read the script, neither my agents, my mom, nor I knew what a fluffer was — and I was the first one to find out because I read the script first,” Badgley says. “That is a microcosm of the whole thing! Should a 12-year-old be … ? Let’s go ahead and just say no.”

He worked steadily as a teenager, mostly on television. He took the GED when he was 13, and when I express surprise at this disclosure, Badgley dismisses the accomplishment, saying he did it only so he didn’t have to have a tutor on set and could work adult hours, “which makes you more attractive on your résumé.”

Badgley’s relative anonymity as a young actor ended abruptly during the fall of 2007, when, at age 20, he became an instant celebrity as part of the dazzling “Gossip Girl” ensemble. The glossy CW soap opera, in which sophisticated high school students plotted and caroused like adults, was a zeitgeist hit, even if its ratings were low. (“We were always the struggling show that was a worldwide hit,” Badgley says with a laugh.) But fans were obsessed, and he and his co-stars were paparazzi prey in New York City, where they worked and played. And the rapacious gossip press was especially interested in his romantic relationship with his co-star Blake Lively. “Beyond our relationship, I don’t think anybody was going to be interested in me publicly,” he says.

Suit: Dior; Sweater: Hermes; Shoes: Louis Vuitton

> “I was never anything that I would define as suicidal, but I was certainly in a despair. It had to do with ‘Do *I* matter? Do I *matter*? Does anything matter?’ The answer that I came upon was ‘Yes.’”
>
> *–Penn Badgley*

“It was a little bit night and day,” Badgley says of realizing his life had changed when “Gossip Girl” premiered. “I think the date was Sept. 19, 2007.”

Badgley and I meet twice to talk, with the first interview taking place in late October in West Hollywood, and the second late last month over breakfast in Brooklyn, close to where he lives with Kirke-Badgley — to whom he’s been married since 2017 — their toddler and his teenage stepson. During our first conversation, Badgley’s car had just been stolen off the street in Brooklyn, so he kept having to step away to speak with Kirke-Badgley on the phone about logistics. “You feel kind of betrayed, but you don’t know by who,” he says. “My wife, because she’s there on the ground with my kids, I think she’s just … it’s surprisingly emotional. We’ll be OK. We can get another car. We’ve got insurance, all that stuff, but it never feels good.”

During our second meeting, Badgley’s energy feels lighter, and he’s quick to laugh. He was bearded during our first interview, as he is in Season 4 of “You,” but since he’s been in stay-at-home-dad mode for a few months, it’s gotten bushier, and his hair is longer too. While it had made sense during the show’s first three seasons for Joe to hide his murderous self behind a more clean-cut look, Badgley pushed for him to have a beard this time — and won. But then, “I was just wanting the hair to be as long as possible,” he says. “And they were like, ‘Mmm, *less*.’ We found a happy medium.”

In person, Badgley is serious and thoughtful. But he’s also affable, dryly funny and open to answering anything, no matter how personal.

More than a decade ago, “Gossip Girl” was nearing its end. For years, while doing the show, “I didn’t want to be in television,” he says, and “I was biding time a lot with Dan — I was not invested. And I’m not saying it’s a good thing! I’m saying it’s just what it was.”

When he looks back on those years, “there’s two ways I see them.” “Fun and fast-paced” is the first way he’d characterize that era. But underneath was a “dark undercurrent that would bottom out in my later 20s.” I ask whether any of the darkness was substance abuse-related, and he waves me off. “To be honest, I never struggled with substance,” Badgley says. “Blake didn’t drink, and I think our relationship in some ways saved me from forcing myself to go down that road.”

That’s interesting phrasing: “*forcing myself to go down that road*.” It indicates that when Badgley found himself facing “nothing short of a spiritual crisis,” he sought solace from all corners: by traveling, exploring Buddhism, trying “a lot of physical techniques, from breathing to meditation,” and throwing himself into political causes, such as Occupy Wall Street. As for what had provoked this state of emergency, he smiles somewhat bashfully as he answers: “Like anybody who experiences some degree of fame and wealth, I was presented with the universal truth that not only does it not make your life better or easier, it actually can greatly complicate things, and make you quite unhappy.”

He felt isolated; he didn’t know who to trust. “I was never anything that I would define as suicidal at all, but I was certainly in a despair,” Badgley says. “It had to do with ‘Do *I* matter? Do I *matter*? Does anything matter?’ These questions do inform how we feel. The answer that I came upon was ‘Yes.’ I think we all have to come to that. I don’t know how you could come to ‘No’ and be happy, so we all have to come to that ‘Yes’ somehow. Probably repeatedly.”

Traveling led him circuitously to the Baha’i faith, through a man he met in Colombia while both were living with the Kogi tribe. This almost sounds like a parody, but the man was the “other young white dude from New York City.” They didn’t stay in touch, but “over the years we just connected in these really serendipitous ways,” and through him, Badgley discovered “the mystical poetry of Baha’u’llah” — the founder of Baha’i, who lived in Persia in the 19th century — “which really started speaking to my heart.”

In Badgley’s telling, it was in August 2014, after the death of Michael Brown and the #BlackLivesMatter protests began in Ferguson, Mo., that he went further into the world of Baha’i. “I was thinking a lot about social change, social action, social transformation — but also my own transformation, my own change,” he says. He saw Baha’i teachings, which say that we’re all connected, as offering “the most committed pathway from individual transformation to social transformation.”

“I thought to myself, ‘If I really want to participate in the betterment of the world, I think that I should become a Baha’i,’” Badgley says.

He formally declared himself Baha’i in May 2015, “but that’s just a step along the way,” Badgley says. He’s since found his place in “this really interesting, eccentric group of people,” which includes his “Podcrushed” co-hosts. Consequently, of all the performing arts, “singing is the thing I do the most,” he says. “It’s a part of my spiritual practice — my prayers are often me singing.” When he’s not in production, he wakes up with his young son, and they sing together.

It certainly seems like Badgley has found peace. And he’s ready for what comes after “You” as well. In the opinion of Sera Gamble, the “You” showrunner who’s worked with Badgley for almost six years, “I think he has more than proven that he’s someone people really, really want to watch.” She pauses, then laughs. “But, you know, Penn gets to do whatever he wants.”

So what *does* Badgley want? He’s been starring on television shows off and on for more than 20 years. “I did most of that without any kids or spouse, you know? Or any real consideration for family — and now all that’s very different,” he says. “And I didn’t do it with anything other than the pipe dreams of being a producer or a director or writer. Now I’m in the DGA, and I’m a producer on the podcast and have the rights to a Sedaris story. … ”

Badgley stops talking for a bit, appearing to consider what lies ahead: more acting, sure, but

> "It's not easy to have the world rooting for you when you've murdered as many people as Joe has. Everyone was like, 'I want Joe Goldberg to murder me,' And Penn was like, 'Ladies, no! Do not. Do not be attracted to this man.'"
>
> *–Sarah Schechter*

also producing, podcasting, directing, writing. He then looks resolute as he finishes his thought. "If this is how I'm going to exist in a way that for me is sustainable — emotionally and spiritually and psychologically — then *this* is how I'm gonna do it."

It's funny to think that when Badgley was first approached about "You," he absolutely did not want to do it.

Playing someone like Joe Goldberg just wasn't appealing, despite it being alluring to Badgley that the character subversively took "the tropes of Dan Humphrey, put it in a blender and sort of reconfigured and re-served it," he says. But having found peace in his life, he had little desire to play someone so awful.

Less typically, he was also concerned with how inherently sexual the role was, and how many intimate scenes he would have to film. In later seasons, the show has had an intimacy coordinator, but when production began in 2017, that job didn't exist. The whole series revolves around Joe's romantic fixations, and how he gets the women he's fallen for to submit to his charms. "You" has a ton of sex.

Badgley speaks carefully as he describes his discomfort with sex scenes, "having done a fair amount of them in my career." "It's not a place where I've blurred lines," he says. "There's almost nothing I could say with more consecration. That aspect of Hollywood has always been very disturbing to me — and that aspect of the job, that mercurial boundary — has always been something that I actually don't want to play with at all." He's also now older than his romantic interests on the show. "Didn't used to be the case," he says.

In fact, Badgley wishes he didn't have to do any sex scenes. "It's important to me in my real life to not have them." (The scenes in the current season of "You" are all done fully clothed.)

"Your 'real life'?" I ask.

"My fidelity in my relationship," Badgley says. "It's important to me. And actually, it was one of the reasons that I initially wanted to turn the role down. I didn't tell anybody that. But that is why."

But Kirke-Badgley "encouraged" him to play Joe: "And I wasn't going to listen to anyone more than her."

As those conversations with his wife were happening, he was also being won over by executive producers Greg Berlanti, Schechter and Gamble. "I felt his energy change when he realized that we were all on the same page about why we would tell a story about a character like this — it was in no way to justify Joe," Gamble says. "It was to vivisect him, to figure out why a milder version of this character is the lead in most romantic stories in the Western canon."

At one point, Badgley remembers, Berlanti referred to "You" as "a love story" — which caused Badgley to bristle. He told Berlanti, "I don't think of this as a love story. But just assuming that it is, for a moment, then what is it saying about love?"

"Greg took the perfect dramatic pause," Badgley remembers, "and he said, 'I'm not sure, but I think we'll discover that together.' A role in a television show had never offered me that level of collaboration. And that's what caused me to stop my retreat from the possibility and be like, 'Hmm, that's cool.'"

So appealing is Badgley as Joe Goldberg that a lustful segment of rabid "You" fans frequently declare on social media that they want nothing more than to be stalked and kidnapped by him. This disturbing, persistent Joe-as-thirst-trap phenomenon is something Badgley is horrified by, and has addressed publicly a number of times, including answering a simple "No thx" to a fan who tweeted, "kidnap me pls."

As Schechter puts it: "It's not easy to have the world rooting for you when you've murdered as many people as Joe Goldberg has." She remembers that first wave of viewers' unhealthy feelings for Joe. "Everyone was like, 'I want Joe Goldberg to murder me,'" she says. "And Penn was like, 'Ladies, no! Do not. Do not be attracted to this man.' He's just a very solid human being who recognizes the importance of playing this part and the chance to showcase and create discussion around toxic masculinity."

Originally based on a book by Caroline Kepnes, "You" is an addictive, utterly mad character study while also being a layered satire about the aforementioned toxic masculinity. The success of "You" rests largely on Badgley — the only actor who's appeared in all four seasons — and his ability to charm the audience into sticking with the show.

Without Netflix, though, "You" would have been one and done. It premiered on Lifetime in September 2018 and was an absolute mismatch for the "Television for Women" cable network — a total of 650,000 people watched it. "You" bombed, and Lifetime canceled it that December.

But before the show premiered, Netflix had signed on as its streaming partner, licensing its reruns and international rights. So when the first season of the already canceled "You" dropped on the streamer on Dec. 26, 2018, it became a massive, meme-generating smash, and the conversation around the show was suddenly ubiquitous. Back then, Netflix was reluctant to share its ratings, but "You" proved the rare exception: After the show hit the streamer, the company tweeted that "You" was on track to be watched by 40 million households within its first four weeks.

Having turned the series into an international phenomenon, Netflix, of course, resurrected it, quickly putting a second season into production. According to Netflix's publicly available stats, "You" has only grown: Its third season spent eight weeks in the streamer's global Top 10, and reached the Top 10s in 94 countries. It's still wildly popular in Season 4 — a rarity for a Netflix show.

"You" is — among its other attributes — a fasci-

Blazer: Berluti; Sweater: Frame; Pants: Hermes; Shoes: Thom Browne

nating exercise in the power of perspective and the camera's gaze, and since Joe is the point-of-view character, it's hard not to worry for him, and fear he'll be caught. "You forget that he's irredeemable! And you're constantly wondering if he can redeem himself," Badgley says. Which makes Joe's shockingly violent nature and overall loathsome existence even more unsettling. "Everybody must have moments when they're like, 'How do I like this show so much?'"

Over four seasons, Joe has romanced/murdered his way through New York City, L.A., Madre Linda (a fictional, affluent Bay Area suburb) — and now, in Season 4, London.

But wherever Joe goes, there he is. Gamble says, "What we've basically been telling ourselves for these four seasons is that Joe goes crazier every season."

In London, Joe has a new identity as Jonathan Moore, a university professor who's come to Europe to stalk his Season 3 quarry, Marienne (Tati Gabrielle). But when he tries to start over, embedding in a new group of high-society friends, he finds himself in an all-too-familiar situation — that is, with a dead body in his apartment. The season then takes the form of a whodunit, as Joe seeks out the tormentor who's setting him up by killing others in the group. By the end of the fifth episode, Joe has discovered what he thinks is the answer.

Naturally, he has a love interest this season in Kate, played by Charlotte Ritchie. Like so many before her, Kate saw the darkness in Joe before becoming captivated by him.

But this is "You," so nothing can be taken at face value, and where Joe ends up in the finale will shock even the most astute viewers. "They always manage to stick the landing," Badgley says. "The triple axel of every season finale is very hard."

As the streaming age of television matures, there have been more and more bumps along the way, beginning with Netflix's correction last year, which caused the whole industry (and Wall Street) to question whether this model will ever pay off. But for all that agita, "You" is one of the period's great successes.

As for how the show will end — will Joe be justly punished after everything he's done? Badgley finds the question interesting. "Is killing Joe enough?" he wonders. "Whoever kills him is brought down to his level." He has an idea of what Berlanti and Gamble have in mind, but won't say what it is. "I think it's the only way it can go," he says.

Putting those questions aside, directing an episode this season fulfilled a long-standing wish. When I ask what surprised him the most about it, he answers quickly. "Maybe that I really loved it? Not that I expected not to, but — I *loved* it," he says. "It reinvented the show for me."

Despite how much Badgley took to directing, he's pretty sure he doesn't want to do it again during a presumed fifth season of "You." It was too much. After a day of acting, he'd come back to his place in London — he was staying with Kirke-Badgley's aunt during production — and work with editors in Los Angeles over Zoom.

"I was managing it, and not even feeling exhausted at all — I was very alive to the work," he says. "And it was really enjoyable, but extreme and unsustainable. And if my family had been there, I would have had zero time for them."

Even if that does turn out to be the only episode of "You" Badgley directs, let it be known that it contains a Taylor Swift reference. So does that mean Joe is a Swiftie?

"I think, unfortunately, he would despise her," Badgley says. "Because she's successful and blond, maybe? I don't know, but I think he would." ●

Pink Side of Life

The Grammy-winning singer is stronger than ever — practically bionic — with her new album ‘Trustfall’

By CHRIS WILLMAN

I

In a world of hyphenates, Pink all but dares us to come up with one to describe her place in the pop landscape, besides anything so earthbound as "singer-songwriter." Maybe "gymnast-therapist" would do it — her appeal mixes literal feats of daring with songs of dysfunction and its hoped-for cessation. As she gets to the inevitable moment in any of her shows where she acrobatically flies over arenas in a harness while encouraging her audiences to get it together before it's too late, it's not always clear whether the work she's doing should be subject to American Psychological Association or Federal Aviation Administration approval.

For now, the determinedly athletic Top 40 troubadour is grounded at her home just inland from Santa Barbara, enjoying some calm before the storm that will be her first headlining tour to touch down in some of the biggest stadiums in America. She'll be touring behind the February release of her ninth studio album, "Trustfall." The title is figurative, of course, but there is an element that will verge on the literal when she'll be going out on wires high over the 50-yard line this summer.

The fact that she will be in huge open-air venues, with no roof to hang from, does not mean that she won't be able to still look down on her audience. "The 360 flying that I do attaches itself to the *back* of the stadium, not the roof, so I can actually go farther and higher. And I don't always love that," she says. "Especially the higher part. I mean, every tour I do, the technology is more advanced; I figure by the time I need that hip replacement, it's gonna be easy."

The hip replacement joke isn't meant to be funny, at least not entirely; hip surgery was just one of the things that had her on the operating table during the pandemic. She is freshly scarred but undaunted, as a Pink tour without aerialism is like a Pink album without multiple uses of the word "fuck."

Right now, sipping coffee out of a cup labeled "World's Best Boss" and tamping down the enthusiasm of her dog, Habanero Mountain Guy (a large rescue of indeterminate breeding dubbed as such "because I let my 3-year-old name him"), Pink could be any suburban mom who just happens to have a platinum coif flattened from left to right across the top of her head. Her extreme chillness at the moment offers little indication of the intensity of her workouts, or even the psychological intensity that underlines her sometimes life-or-death lyrics.

"Having breaks is good for my voice. Not so good for the body," she says after putting Habanero Mountain Guy outside to sniff the sea air. "Especially during COVID — I gained 36 pounds. All I did was make sourdough and then eat the sourdough. And then I had not just the hip surgery but double disc replacement in my neck. So now I'm the bionic woman. I've lost those 36 pounds, and I am stronger than I've ever been in my life. And I'm ready to go, and I'm ready to get the *hell* out of here. I've been home way too long."

There are motivations, especially when you have Tina Turner's manager, Roger Davies, as your own. Asked if she ever queried Davies about any secrets to Turner's success in keeping the touring regime going as long as she did, Pink says it never occurred to her — she knows what she witnessed with her own two eyes.

"I saw Tina when she was 69 in Christian Louboutins, running around the stage, full choreography, like a crazy person. And I thought to myself: *Shit. So now I have no excuse.* I look at the greats and I wanna keep up. I want to keep pushing it and be better — a better human, a better mom, a better daughter, a better sister, a better performer, a better writer. And age works against you, right? But at 43, I'm stronger than I've ever been in my life. I could kick my 33-year-old ass."

As for the specifics of moonlighting as a stuntwoman, she says, "Well, it's always interesting the day the insurance company comes to yes or no your insurance. And every time they say yes, I'm like, 'Are you kidding me? They actually said yes?'" She shrugs. This may be the time when she'll be glad if the crew that keeps her aloft really does consider her World's Best Boss.

The real test of Pink's nerve is that she has enlisted two of the most powerful female vocalists on the planet, Brandi Carlile and Pat Benatar, as her direct support acts for the "Summer Carnival" stadium tour (the North American part of which begins July 24 in Toronto and ends Oct. 9 in Phoenix, following a European leg in June). Pink and Carlile go back — they wrote a still-unrecorded song together 15 years ago. "The first time I heard her sing, I was in my car and it was when her voice cracks during 'The Story,' and I had to pull my car over," Pink remembers. She met Benatar at October's Rock and Roll Hall of Fame ceremony, where Pink and Carlile were saluting Dolly Parton and Benatar was getting her own honors. Pink figured, and had it confirmed, that Benatar had to be classically trained to be singing like that at 70. "I ran up to her that night and was like, 'Can we be best friends?'"

Pink is properly self-analytical when it comes to the evolution of her own chops. "I feel like I've found three voices in 43 years," she declares. "My first voice was opera, because I used to sing 'Phantom of the Opera' and 'Les Miz' — things like that. Then my second voice was R&B-ish, but I sounded like Alvin from Alvin and the Chipmunks. But I was also smoking, and I was steadily getting raspier and raspier, which is why covering Janis Joplin was an easy sell for me. I loved it, but then it started going too far. Billy Mann, my

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Pink at the Ohana Festival in Dana Point, Calif., in 2022

friend and songwriting partner, sat me down and said, 'I think you're at the point now where you have to ask yourself, "Am I a singer or a smoker?"' Hmm. 'Shoot. I think you're right.' So I quit." This happened around 2010, when she was pregnant with her first child, Willow, now 12. "And then I found this grown-up voice that I have and got two octaves back. My voice has never been stronger. But I don't have that rasp anymore, and I miss that — I wish I could have kept a little bit of it. But," she adds with a shrug and a sip, "I chose life instead."

Making the conscious choice to go on is a big theme of "Trustfall." Not entirely ironically, it starts with a ballad about death and the afterlife, prompted somewhat by her father's death in August 2021, as well as mortal thoughts that arose when both she and her son contracted bad cases of COVID. Starting the album off with a non-banger was as conscious a choice as everything Pink does.

"I feel like we're all in this constant state of *overwhelm*, and so we put our feelings away just so that we can get through a day. I wanted to find a way back to the truth and the authentic feelings. So opening the album with that, it's like, 'Sit down. I want to talk to you. We're gonna clear all the bullshit away and have a *conversation*.'"

It's easy to get the sense that for many fans, it's "*me and Pink against the world*" — whether that has to do with her support of the LGBTQ community or advocacy for older women or disaffected-youth friendliness. "A lot of my friends have teenagers, and they all have just debilitating anxiety." She describes playing the new song "Turbulence," which describes life in terms of an extended panic attack, for her daughter's friends, "and, like, five of them were just sobbing.

"But that's why we have music and dancing. And that's the other part of the record, with songs like 'Never Gonna Not Dance Again'." She leans forward to deliver all of us existentially challenged grown-ups a pep talk like she did with the girls that day. "Just let it go, man. We have to have joy too. We have to laugh. We have to love. We have to cuddle. We have to suck the marrow out of the bones of life, because we're still here. The wildfires haven't come yet."

The most personal song on the new record may be the harrowing ballad "Lost Cause," sung from the point of view of a woman who just wants to be told she isn't a piece of shit. Written by Stephen Wrabel, Sam de Jong and Sam Romans, it resonated with Pink because of a conversation she had with her husband, Carey Hart. "He came to me a long time ago — at a good moment, when we *weren't* arguing — and said, 'Hey, when we argue and you say really mean things, it hurts me and I really need you to stop.' I was blown away, like, 'Whoa, what a beautiful thing to do, to bring that up at a time where everything's going well.' Time moves on and you both get mean after a while, and the world is mean."

Which brings Pink to a particularly disturbing kind of mean: "The things people say to me online, it's insane," she says. "And I'm like, 'You can call me a loser, but just don't tell me I'm unredeemable.'" She adds, "*Everybody* is redeemable. I don't believe old dogs can't learn new tricks."

For Pink's audience, anyway, her finding new ways to execute somersaults at 275 feet above the ground may serve as a metaphor, or inspiration, for all the new therapeutic tricks that can be picked up through self-reflection. It's the stunts that make Pink an ultimate girl boss; it's the sentiments that, for much of the crowd below, make her World's Best Mom. ●

(Opening spread) Kurt Iswarienko; (This page) Andrew MacPherson

BATGIRL RISES

In her first major interview since Warner Bros. Discovery canned the $90 million film 'Batgirl,' its star, Leslie Grace, is speaking out

By Marc Malkin

When "Batgirl" completed its seven-month production in Scotland, star Leslie Grace received a wrap gift from Brendan Fraser, who played her nemesis, Firefly, in the DC movie — a gold necklace that included two charms, a little bell and a pair of dice. "The card said a lot of really sweet things, but he basically said, 'I give you this necklace because in this business you gotta have a little luck. So ring your bell and never stop,'" Grace says. "It was just like, *Whoa*. And after all this, it's had so much meaning."

"All this" is the August bombshell that Warner Bros. Discovery had decided to kill the film, co-directed by Adil El Arbi and Bilall Fallah. After the first disappointing test screenings, WBD CEO David Zaslav chose to take a tax write-off instead of trying to complete work on the film, which had cost the debt-ridden studio $90 million, and would have cost many more millions to finish.

Leslie Grace as Batgirl

Grace says she had no idea the movie, originally set to stream on HBO Max, was shelved, until it was first reported by the New York Post. "I found out like the rest of you," she says. "And then my phone just started blowing up."

Like Grace, Fraser says he was blindsided by the news. "I thought I was getting punked, but it checked out," he says of reading the initial stories. "Then came hysterical laughter like, '*You've got to be kidding me?*' I know that the filmmakers and producers were expecting to hear from the studio about the film, and the anticipation was, 'How do we broaden the movie out to take it from a streaming format to a theatrical release?' But as we all know, it was the complete opposite. When we were expecting XYZ amount of support and money to expand scenes — to do pickup shots and those kinds of things — that was a gut punch. But then we learned that it was in the interest of writing down some debt? That part really stung."

Fraser immediately called Grace. "What I find most lamentable is that now a whole generation of little girls is going to have to wait longer to see a Batgirl and say, 'Hey, she looks like me,'" he says. "That makes me sad. I know how good she was. And I know what this would mean to so many people."

Grace is now back in the spotlight with "How to Win Friends and Disappear People," a new comedy-thriller podcast series from QCode about a computer scientist (Soni Bringas) in New York City who discovers her neighbor, played by Grace, is a vampire.

Variety talked at length with the 28-year-old actress. It's the first time she's opened up in such depth since learning of Batgirl's fate.

When the news came out in August that the movie was being shelved, what went through your mind?

It was like deflating a balloon. On that day, I was very much just taking it all in, but also so sure of the magic that happened — in my experience and what I saw in my cast, in our team — that I was like, "This must be some crazy thing that we have no control over." I tend to be a very optimistic and positive person in these types of circumstances, and I just really leaned on the beauty of the idea that I got to have this experience in my life. Even though I would've loved to share that with the rest of the world, nothing can take that experience away from us.

> "I got to see the film as far as it got to. The film that I saw — the scenes that were there — was incredible. There was definitely potential for a good film, in my opinion."
>
> LESLIE GRACE

New DC Studios head Peter Safran most recently said the movie was "not releasable," and that it could have could hurt DC. Is there anything in your mind that can justify that?

I had my own meetings with Warner Bros. Film Group CEOs Pam Abdy and Mike De Luca, and they explained to me, on a granular level, what they felt about the project, things that were out of their hands, plans and budgets that were set in place before they were even part of the team. There are a lot of things that I learned through the experience about moviemaking, that as an actress you have no control over. They weren't really specific on anything creative in terms of what they felt about the film and how it would've hurt DC creatively. But I'm a human being, and people have perceptions and people read things. And when words are expressed very lightly about work that people really dedicated a lot of time to — not just myself but the whole crew — I can understand how it could be frustrating.

There was nothing that you saw while you were shooting that said, "This movie's not going to work"?

I'm not going to lie to you. In every film, there are obstacles, and our film was nothing short of that. Half of the shoot was night shoots in Scotland, where it never stops raining. So there were obstacles, but at the end of the day, because of the incredible crew, nothing that ever got in the way of us delivering what we knew we wanted to deliver for this film. At least from what I was able to see.

Did you ever see a final cut of the film?

That's the one thing I asked for. I got to see the film as far as it got to; the film wasn't complete by the time that it was tested. There were a bunch of scenes that weren't even in there. They were at the beginning of the editing process, and they were cut off because of everything going on at the company. But the film that I got to see — the scenes that were there — was incredible. There was definitely potential for a good film, in my opinion. Maybe we'll get to see clips of it later on.

When you spoke to *Variety* last April, you had just wrapped the movie and you said you were already talking to the directors about a sequel.

We still are. We were so excited about all the ideas that we had, because you can see long-term potential in the story that we were beginning to build.

Obviously, Peter Safran and his co-chairman at DC, James Gunn, weren't there when this decision was made, but have they reached out to you?

No, I haven't heard from them. But I wish them the best on all the plans that they've got rolling out. They've got a lot of projects to handle, and it's not an easy job.

Matt Reeves' "Batman" with Robert Pattinson is getting a sequel, and there's talk that it will include more of the Bat family. Would you consider coming back to play Batgirl?

We've definitely had conversations about Batgirl's future and how Batgirl can make a resurgence. I think fans are looking forward to seeing that. We'll just see where that takes us; I can't say one way or the other if that is a reality at this point. I can't speak too much about a future for Batgirl or guarantee anything. The last thing that I would want to do is give folks any kind of inkling of something that I have not much control over — as we've learned. ●

(Previous spread) Mark Adriane; (This page) Courtesy of DC Films

OG Ice-T Rolls to Hollywood Walk of Fame

Reality rap master brings street cred to acting and commercials career • *By A.D. Amorosi*

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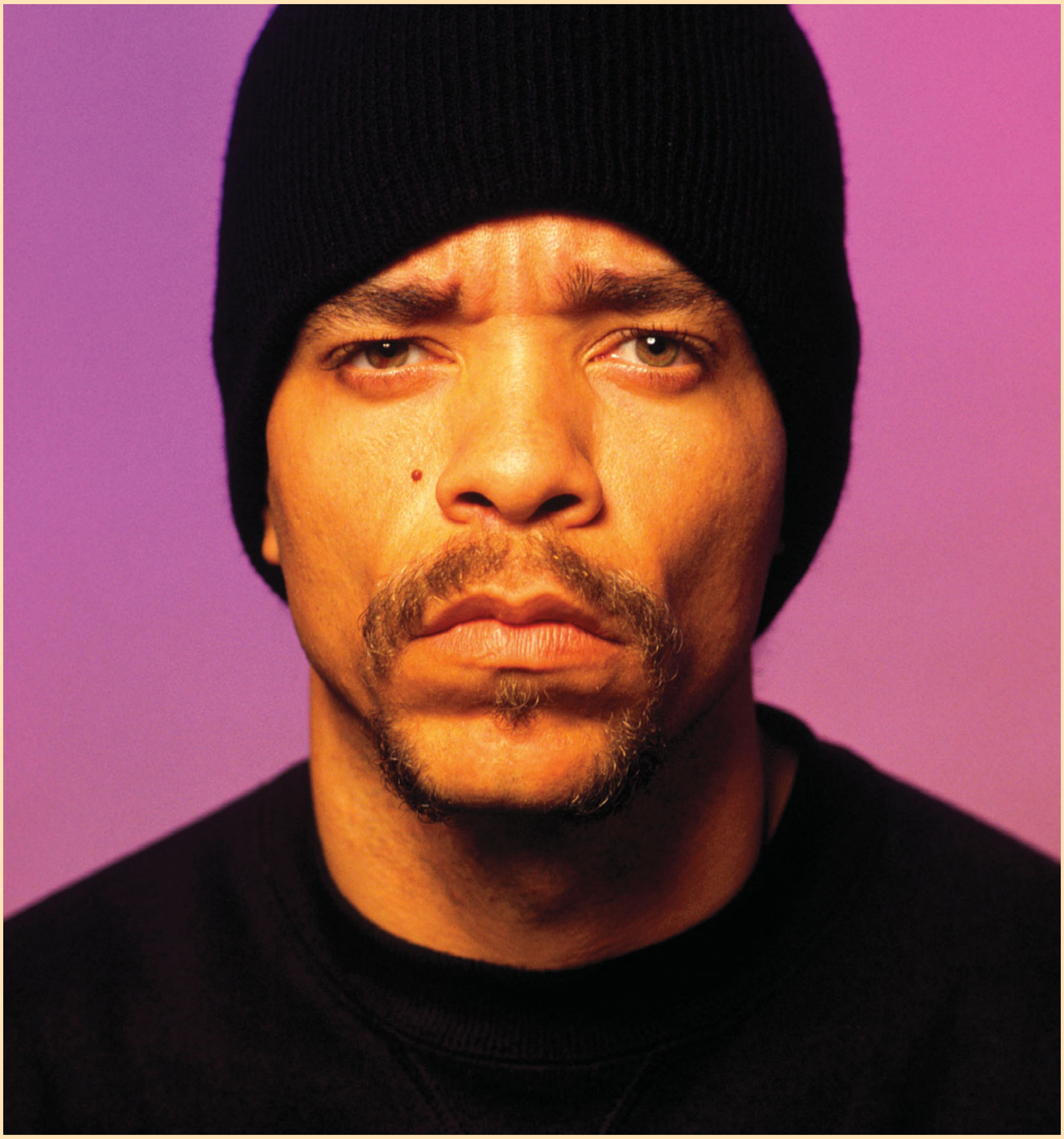
Ice-T released his first single in 1983.

Al Pereira/Michael Ochs Archives/Getty Images



↑ Ice-T, born Tracy Marrow, got into hip-hop when he was in the Army.

Steve Jennings/WireImage/Getty Images

> **“Me and Dick Wolf connect on a very gangster level. He’s the boss. I’m part of his organization. He’s never lied to me. He’s always paid up.” — Ice-T**

In his lifetime, Tracy Marrow has been everything from a dancer and a DJ, to a thief and a weed dealer. Yet, from the minute Marrow became Ice-T, his renown developed and grew.

Initially, being Ice-T meant becoming hip-hop’s most incendiary voice, a sinister avatar of the reality-rap style tagged by the press as “gangster” (along with his thrash metal band, Body Count). Equally famous was Ice-T’s gig as an actor-with-attitude in films such as “New Jack City” and — since 2000 — for television producer Dick Wolf’s police drama “Law & Order: Special Victims Unit” as NYPD Detective Odafin Tutuola.

Ice-T brings street cred to everything he does — including commercials. He beams with pride discussing his hood past and how its raw-knuckle spirit remains. Even seeing Ice-T riding a spin cycle, promoting Cheerios and heart health, is hardcore. And it all starts with hip-hop. Despite its current state of musicality being — in his words, “goofy” — Ice-T is the soul of rap’s rough potency.

Speaking by phone from New Jersey (with wife Coco and their dog, Lexus, in the background), Ice-T reminisced about the hip-hop game, further fame and getting his flowers by way of Feb. 17’s star ceremony on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.

● **If someone told you at your start that you would get a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, what would you have said?** I would have told you that was impossible. When I started making records, I didn’t come into the music business thinking I would be a star. I was just seeing if I could get a fan base. I didn’t want to be the best rapper. I just wanted to be mentioned among the greats: LL Cool J, Run-DMC. Getting any “star” was way out of reach.

● **Your name is synonymous with “West Coast rap,” but you’re from the East Coast and only came to California after your parents passed. Did art change your life in California?** Yeah, I went to Crenshaw High. That’s how I got introduced to Los Angeles gang culture. I also got introduced to dancers because I was in gymnastics. There was a dance, “locking,” made famous by the Lockers. Shabba Doo was a Locker, as was Toni Basil. I had a dance group called the West Coast Locksmiths, with whom I won a talent show in high school emulating the Lockers. That was my first time dealing with fame, feeling the excitement of being a celebrity.

● **When did making music become your game?** In high school, I read books by Iceberg Slim and Donald Goines, street novels based on hustling, pimping and gangsterism, written in the lingo of the life. Rapping didn’t happen until after I got my girlfriend pregnant, tried to do something legitimate and went into the Army. That’s when hip-hop came out. All the Army guys from New York brought tapes, and I got fascinated. I was

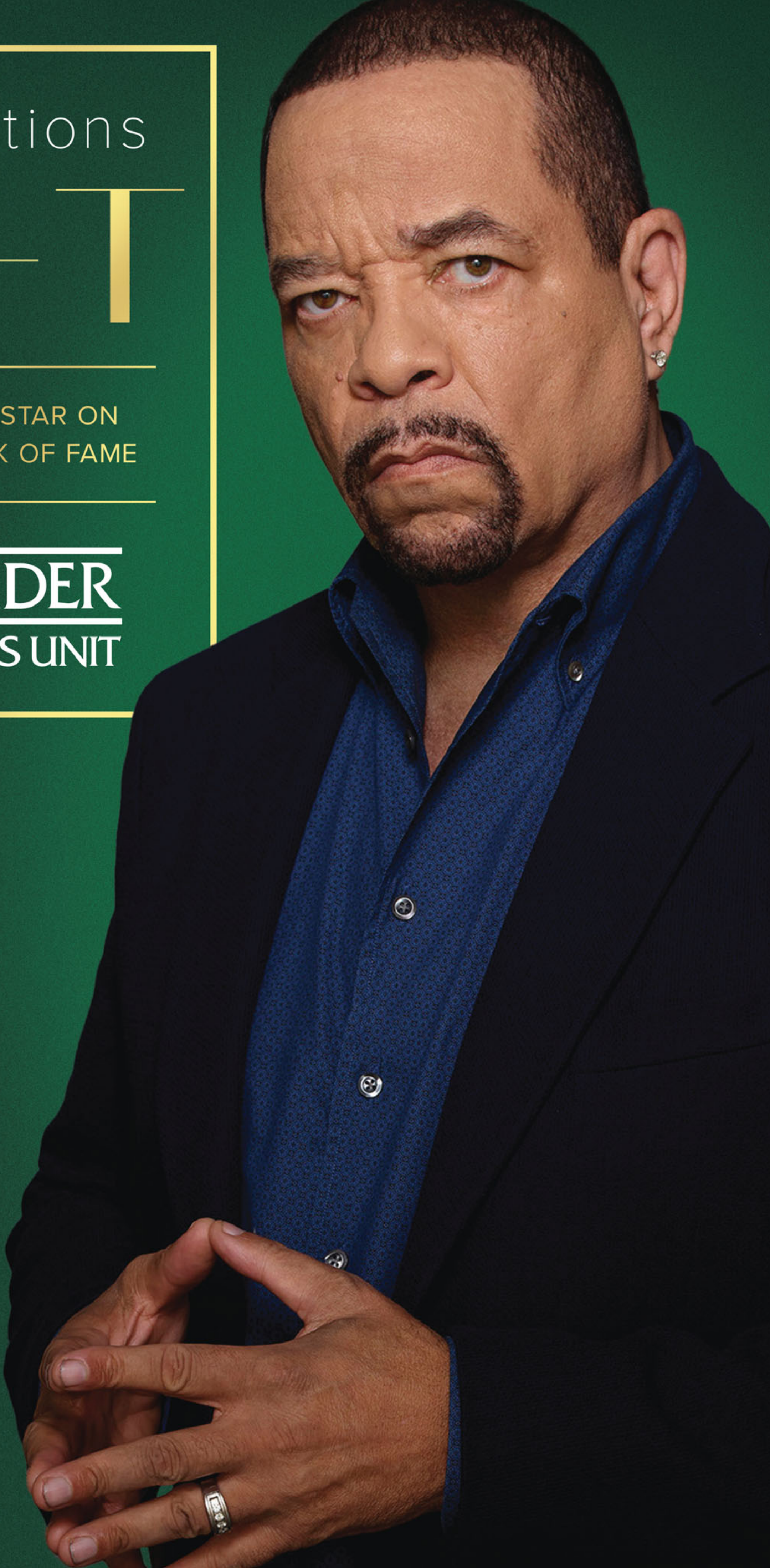
congratulations

ICE-T

ON RECEIVING YOUR STAR ON
THE HOLLYWOOD WALK OF FAME

LAW & ORDER
SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT

UNIVERSAL
TELEVISION
A DIVISION OF UNIVERSAL STUDIO GROUP



already making rhymes for the gangbangers during the time I was dancing. I found that if you don't want to have to deal with gangbangers, entertain them. My intention was to come home from the military, DJ and throw parties. I bought equipment, hooked up with promoters like Uncle Jam's Army in L.A. That was a nice hustle. But I got more attention during parties when I rapped. That was easier than carrying speakers around.

● **Your first single, 1983's "The Coldest Rap," was by no means hardcore. A year later, your writing became politicized with "Killers," then harder with "6 in the Mornin'." What was your goal beyond reporting what you saw around you, "gangster rap" or otherwise?** "Coldest Rap" was players' stuff. Hip-hop braggadocio. "Islands off the coast of France?" I'm in the hood. What did I know about France? But every rapper said they had a mansion and a yacht. When I wrote "Killers," it was the time of Run-DMC's "It's Like That." I rapped on "Killers" as two people, back-and-forth. Gangster rap? I heard Schoolly D's "PSK" at a club in Santa Monica. What was so dope was that he wasn't yelling. At that time, all rappers were yelling. Not Schoolly. Who was this fly motherfucker? Then I realized Schoolly was repping Parkside Killers, and that validated the idea of talking about THAT shit, someone repping a GANG. That was the inspiration for "6 in the Mornin'." I even used Schoolly's cadence. I took you on a South-Central adventure, writing what I called "faction" — factual occurrences put into fictional stories. Everything in "6 in the Mornin'" happened. It may just not have happened to me. That was "faction," reality rap, depending on whose reality you were talking about. That didn't get named "gangster" until [Ice] Cube did "Straight Outta Compton," and referred to N.W.A as a gang. The press ran with that. Then I called myself the "original gangster." As much as the press watches us, we watch y'all.

● **You recorded four hip-hop albums — "Rhyme Pays," "Power," "The Iceberg/Freedom of Speech ... Just Watch What You Say," and "O.G. Original Gangster" — then went to thrash metal with Body Count.** Ernie C was a guitar virtuoso who went to Crenshaw, used to do parties where he played Peter Frampton and set off homemade flash pots. Beatmaster V played drums, and, like Ernie, wanted to be in the studio with me. They were my closest friends, but I didn't know how to fit them into hip-hop. During my tour with Public Enemy, I saw white kids moshing off of fast rap. If that was the case, what if I gave these motherfuckers some rock? But if we were going to do it, it had to be a cross between Suicidal Tendencies and Slayer.

● **The first time that people saw Body Count was during the first Lollapalooza in 1991, yes?** Ernie was friends with Perry Farrell who wanted me to be in Jane's Addiction video for "The Gift." Perry was doing this concert and wanted to book Ice-T. I had an hour slot, so I split the set, introduced Body Count and kicked ass. I told the audience we were about to show them that rock and roll had nothing to do with color — it's a state of mind. Body Count is Ice-T over metal. Same attitude. The vocal delivery was intended not a rap-ish, but rather straight metal. Listen to Slayer. Tommy [Araya]'s not singing.

● **You continued with Body Count, even getting Grammy-nominated for 2020's song "Bum-Rush" for metal performance. But you stopped making Ice-T solo albums in 2006. Why?** Hip-hop changed. The music got goofy to me. The kids started looking weird. It all turned into something I wasn't comfortable with. There was a point where I was selling tons of records, then it cooled off. I felt a certain way. Then I realized Public Enemy, Rakim, Big Daddy Kane and Wu-Tang Clan weren't selling records, either. There was a paradigm shift. These kids got softer, and soft is not something I'm able to give audiences. The first word in hip-hop is "hip" so how something stays hip for over 10 years is difficult. ... Besides, I still do my "Ice-T: Art of Rap" shows, which is my legacy hip-hop. Think of it like seeing Frank Sinatra. You want to hear the classics.

→
In 1991, Ice-T landed his first major role as a cop in "New Jack City."

adidas
Body Count
→
Ice-T was part of Body Count, formed in Los Angeles in 1990.

New Jack City: Warner Bros/Everett Collection; Body Count: Roger Kisby/Getty Images

CONGRATULATIONS ICE-T,

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AND CONGRATS TO JORGE HINOJOSA.

- GUY OSEARY

A Wolf Finds His Shark

Ice-T's fruitful TV partnership on 'SVU' leads to long friendship

By Emily Longeretta

Although he may be best known for his successful music career, Ice-T is also on the television of millions every Thursday night.

Acting has been in his blood for years, as he had his breakout role in "New Jack City" in 1991, followed by "Surviving the Game" in 1994. However, it was the next year he met the man who changed his TV career. In 1995, Ice-T landed a recurring role as a drug dealer on Dick Wolf's "New York Undercover," beginning their professional collaborations. After, he co-created "Players," with Wolf as the producer, but that didn't last. So, Wolf gave him a part in 1998's "Exiled: A Law & Order Movie."

← Snoop Dogg and Ice-T have collaborated many times through the years.

↓ Ice-T says he has a unique relationship with "Law & Order: SVU" creator Dick Wolf.

● **In 1991, Body Count courted controversy with "Cop Killer," which you stated was written in character about vengeance against the police. How do you see the duality of "Cop Killer" and "SVU," especially in the era of Black Lives Matter, George Floyd and Tyre Nichols?** I'm acting in both. I never killed a cop. In "Cop Killer," I play a man who was mad at the police, snapped and went after them based on policy brutality. That's acting. Where the media glossed it, is when they said that it was really Ice-T saying to go kill the police. I didn't do that. The same is true of "SVU." I'm not a cop. I'm the furthest thing from a cop. As far as the dilemma with police now — yeah, it is difficult.

People have said that our television shows are police propaganda, making the police look good. I understand that argument. The cop I am on our show is an SVU detective. If I had to be a policeman in real life, it would be that type of cop because there's no gray area. You're chasing rapists and pedophiles. It's hard to be a bad cop in that unit. On the B-side, if you only play bad guys all the time, what are you putting out there? You're a celebrity, but you're pushing the line of being a drug dealer or killer. In acting, someone has to play the slave owner, play these weird people in the world. When I got the job at "SVU," Dick Wolf said to me, "Ice, you don't like cops, right?" I told him that during my criminal past, I didn't hate cops — they were my opponents. [He asked,] "But you admit we need them, right?" I said, "Yeah." So, Wolf told me to play the cop that we need. And if I play the cop that we need, I won't have any problems with it — my cop is a far stretch from the cop that the cop killer wants to kill.

● **Considering your effect on the culture, you were at the peak of your reign as a rapper when you began acting. What were you hoping to achieve?** I was taking advantage of an opportunity that was presented to me. I never wanted to act. I was ready to turn it down because they wanted me to play a cop, at the same time I'm putting out an album called "OG." Are you kidding me? Play a cop? But my friends were like "Motherfucker, if you turn this down, you're a real-life sucker." So, I did it. I didn't know I was going to be successful at it. Acting wasn't something that I desired to do, but now I realized that it was something that I was supposed to do. Like I got a Tide commercial. I didn't want some motherfucking Tide commercial. Oh, it's Coldwater Tide and I'll be with "Stone Cold" Steve Austin? Word. The Honey Nut Cheerios commercial I have out now? They got at me. I didn't ask to be on a Cheerios box. But they told me that Ice-T is healthy, vibrant, still out there and cool — that people love me. So that's who I am.

TIPSHEET

WHAT: Ice-T receives a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame.
WHEN: 11:30 a.m. Feb. 17
WHERE: 7065 Hollywood Blvd.
WEB: walkoffame.com

Snoop Dogg/Ice-T: Theo Wargo/WireImage/VH-1 Channel/Getty Images; Ice-T: Virginia Sherwood/NBC

ICE-T
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CONGRATULATIONS FOR THIS WELL-DESERVED HONOR!

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→ Mariska Hargitay views longtime co-star Ice-T as family.

→ Some of the "SVU" cast were intimidated by Ice-T when he joined the show in Season 2.

Two years later, the world was introduced to Odafin "Fin" Tutuola in Season 2 of "Law & Order: Special Victims Unit," on which he's appeared in more than 400 episodes.

"I think that I am his longest-running employee," says Ice-T, who recalls getting a call from the late Andre Hall, a producer on "New York Undercover."

"I told Andre, 'Fuck you.' I had just come off of 'New Jack City' in film, and didn't need TV. Friendly though, like 'Motherfucker, I don't do television. I'm a movie star,'" he laughs. "They gave me the whole 'C'mon, you too big, now' routine. So, I told Andre to give me a bad guy role and they found one in a character named 'Danny Up.'"

When he showed up, Ice-T was told the plan originally was to kill the character after one episode; instead, they wanted him for more.

After "Players" didn't work, "Dick Wolf said that he wished he would've had a stronger vehicle for me." While he was moving on post-cancelation, he got the call for "SVU."

And at first, he said no.

"They wanted me to come out there and only do four episodes. At the time, I was trying to run a record label, so I was like, 'Eh,'" he recalls. "Four episodes turned into 24 years."

And those two dozen years have been a joy for everyone on the show including star and executive producer Mariska Hargitay.

"I can't say this about a lot of people — not even myself! — but in the 24 years we've been working together, he's never come to the set in a bad mood, and he's never complained," she says. "And he's got some stiff competition, but he might just lead the pack in gratitude for the incredible gift of being able to do this show for all these years."

When he joined the series, Ice-T didn't know anyone on set.

"I took them to the side one day and told them. ... 'You gotta understand who I am. I used to rob banks in real life. If I'm robbing a bank, I don't need to like you. I just need to know if you can get into a safe, control a room, scan the radio and drive. Once we rob a few banks together, we'll become the best fucking friends. Ever.' Now, Mariska and I have been robbing them banks for 24 years," he says. "I always tell Mariska that I've got my life, wife and my daughter, but that I make more money with her, so Mariska's got to know where she ranks in my life. Do not come fucking with Mariska."

As Hargitay remembers, she was "intimidated" when Ice-T joined, since she knew him as an artist and trailblazer. She quickly realized how special he was — "someone deeply true to his principles, kind, wise and just ridiculously generous."

"I think what surprised me most was the gentleness," she adds. "He's a wonderfully curious, principled, loyal, gentle spirit."

The bond between Ice-T and his work family has only continued, both on and off screen.

"Me and Dick Wolf connect on a very gangster level. He's the boss. I'm part of his organization. He's never lied to me. He's always paid up. When he makes an agreement with me, he sticks to the agreement," he says. "I'm not just an actor. I am an activist. I am Body Count. So, if he has a Black card in his deck, it's Ice-T. Any motherfucker comes at him about anything Black, he can say that he's got motherfucking Ice-T on his show. Get the fuck up out of here. If I'm his token Black man, he knows he's got a real one."

A man of few words, Wolf has one thing to say about the actor: "Ice has been the gold standard for the past 28 years."

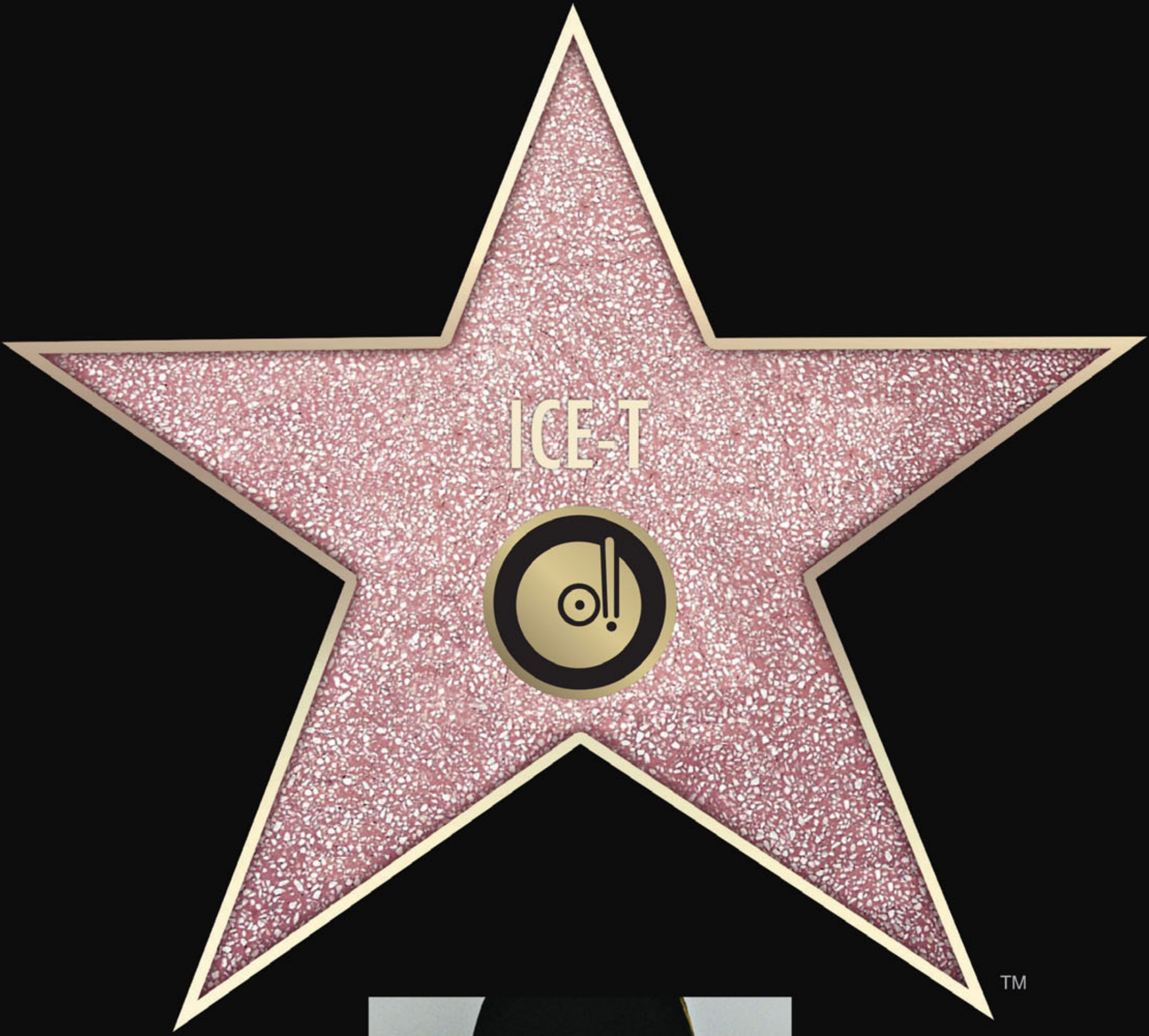
And he has no plans to slow down or shift out of television. In film, he recalls, he filmed two or three scenes in a day. Now, he's doing nine to 10 on "SVU," which he a "bootcamp" for actors.

"To be on a show this long, is like having gone to Harvard and grad school and getting my Ph.D, because every day I'm acting," he says — and is no longer nervous alongside any A-list actor. "I know whatever they can bring, I can bring right back at them. ... Working with an F. Murray Abraham, he told me to learn from the actors I work with and that's the best training. That's where I'm going to get my stuff. So now, I've worked with everybody from Jerry Lewis to Bradley Cooper. They all come through the doors of 'SVU' and I learn something from every one of them." ●

A.D. Amorosi contributed to this report.

(Top) Virginia Sherwood/NBC; (Bottom) Peter Kramer/NBC

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 17 AT 11:30AM PST



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↑ A capella group Pentatonix comprises (left) Scott Hoying, Matt Sallee, Mitch Grassi, Kirstin Maldonado and Kevin Olusola.

Singers Shine in Harmony

A capella group Pentatonix gets starry reception on Hollywood Blvd. ● *By Michele Angermiller*

Stars have been a theme throughout Pentatonix's career. The a cappella group covered Nicki Minaj's "Starships" early on, performed "Stars" from the musical "Finding Neverland," and named their holiday television special "Christmas Under the Stars."

So it's only fitting that the group — comprised of Scott Hoying, Kirstin Maldonado, Mitch Grassi, Kevin Olusola and Matt Sallee — will be honored with their very own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame on Feb. 15.

More than a decade after forming, Pentatonix — a play on the pentatonic scale — became the first a cappella group to win a Grammy for arrangement with a sublime medley of Daft Punk songs in 2015. The group earned two more Grammys including 2016's country duo/group performance for their duet with Dolly Parton on "Jolene," and most recently, their album "Evergreen" was nominated for traditional pop vocal album at the 2023 awards.

"We love all of our album experiences, but something about this one was really special, because it was right at the end of lockdown and we were able to get together again for the first time in over a year," Hoying says of "Evergreen."

Believing their "Grammy days were done," Hoying continues, "We went into a studio every single day and built the songs together and it had this beautiful, creative, visceral energy to it. … To reunite and make something so special and then see it be validated in this way is a reminder that it's never pasture time. There's always the possibility for new beginnings and epic moments."

Since its inception, the group has sold more than 10 million albums from a catalog of 11 full-lengths, including six holiday collections. They've had two No. 1 albums on the Billboard 200 chart: 2015's gold-certified self-titled album and the double platinum "That's Christmas to Me."

The group has received RIAA plaques for multi-platinum, platinum and gold certifications, and its YouTube Channel boasts more than 20 million subscribers. Additional accolades include a Daytime Emmy for musical performance, and appearances in various television shows and broadcast events, like the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree Lighting, Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and the Kennedy Center Honors.

Last year Disney+ aired the holiday special "Pentatonix: Around the World for the Holidays." And the group recently participated in the "Grammy Salute to the Beach Boys" special, which will air on CBS at a later date.

"I feel like we keep being surprised by the things and opportunities that we are presented with," says Hoying. "I didn't think that we could top things we've done in the past, but the Hollywood Walk of Fame feels so iconic."

Hoying first came to Hollywood as a pre-teen, competing in 2004 on "Star Search," then hosted by Arsenio Hall. "We went and looked for his star. So that was the first star I took a picture of," he remembers.

Maldonado, who fondly recalls photographing herself with Celine Dion's star when she was just 15, marvels at Pentatonix's future address. "We're next to Etta James and Cole Porter," she says. "It just feels so crazy special and obviously so iconic to be with all those incredible artists who you looked up to and you've been inspired by all these years."

For Sallee — who joined the group in 2017 after original bass Avi Kaplan departed — being a

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> **“The five of us have such diverse and different music tastes, and so we all will bring in different songs or different ideas.” — Scott Hoying**

part of the Hollywood tapestry is a dream come true. “There’s so many of them,” he says. “I think I walked the whole block because I was so excited.”

Pentatonix’s story is every theater kid’s dream come true. Hoying, Grassi and Maldonado all met in childhood and were classmates at Martin High School in Arlington, Texas. At the time, a new show called “Glee” debuted on television, and the teenagers got word of a radio contest asking groups to submit a song as an entry to meet the cast. With stars in their eyes, the teenagers recorded their version of Lady Gaga’s “Telephone” — and lost.

“We didn’t end up winning, but that’s kind of why we started our little trio thing in the first place,” Maldonado says. “We were just doing it for fun.”

The friends went separate ways after graduation, but Hoying, then studying at USC, learned of a new show, “The Sing-Off,” from a member of the school’s a cappella group, now Pentatonix producer Ben Bram. He rang up Maldonado and Grassi, and through Bram’s advice, expanded to a five-piece, adding bass vocalist Kaplan and beat boxer Olusola, whom he discovered from YouTube videos.

Week after week, the group dominated, winning the show’s third season, and then the grand prize, which resulted in releasing an EP, “PTX Volume 1.”

“That was a crazy time, because we had won the show, we got a record contract and dropped from it,” Hoying says. “And then we moved to a different kind of label, for mainly soundtracks, temporarily.”

What got them through that trying period, Maldonado says, was YouTube, which helped them maintain relationships with the fanbase built by “The Sing-Off.”

“It was really important for us to engage with them, putting out videos, and talking to them on social media,” she says.

Hoying notes the songs chosen by Pentatonix often have striking, emotional qualities that “shine.” “It’s the combination of whatever we’re inspired by, or what’s currently trending at the time,” he says. “The five of us have such diverse and different music tastes, and so we all will bring in different songs or different ideas. I feel like that’s really cool and helps us span a lot.”

Continuous fan engagement along with creative interpretations of songs like “We Are Young” by Fun, went viral on YouTube, but it was the release of a Christmas EP, 2012’s “PTXmas,” that put the group on the holiday map, with covers of “The Little Drummer Boy” and “Carol of the Bells.”

Headlining tours, collaborations (such as one with violinist Lindsey Stirling) and several more viral moments led to a deal with RCA Records in 2014, with the EP “PTX Vol. III” debuting at No. 5 and a second full-length Christmas album, “That’s Christmas to Me,” spawning another holiday classic, “Mary Did You Know?”

“To be a part of people’s memories every Christmas and to hear those stories is so special,” Maldonado says. “I love that we got to do so many Christmas things and it definitely wasn’t the plan. We just thought a cappella and Christmas would go so well together.”

In 2017, Kaplan left the group, leaving an opening for another member to fulfill a dream. Sallee first met the group in a Pentatonix workshop with aspiring singers in Virginia, right after they concluded their run on “The Sing-Off.” “To be able to be able to join the group and sing with them has just been a dream,” he says. “We became family instantaneously and it was just so seamless to transition.”

Adds Maldonado: “There’s five of us with five different schedules, but we all want to not sacrifice the quality of things ever. We’re very fortunate to have a lot of opportunities and when we’re on tour, it’s so easy to get wrapped up in that. I am really proud of where we’re all at creatively, I feel like as long as we all set aside the time and are able to work on everything, it’s really limitless what we can do.”

↓ **The group added Matt Sallee (left) as its newest member in 2017, joining Hoying, Maldanado, Olusola and Grassi.**

TIPSHEET

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WHEN: 11:30 a.m. Feb. 15
WHERE: 6915 Hollywood Blvd.
WEB: walkoffame.com

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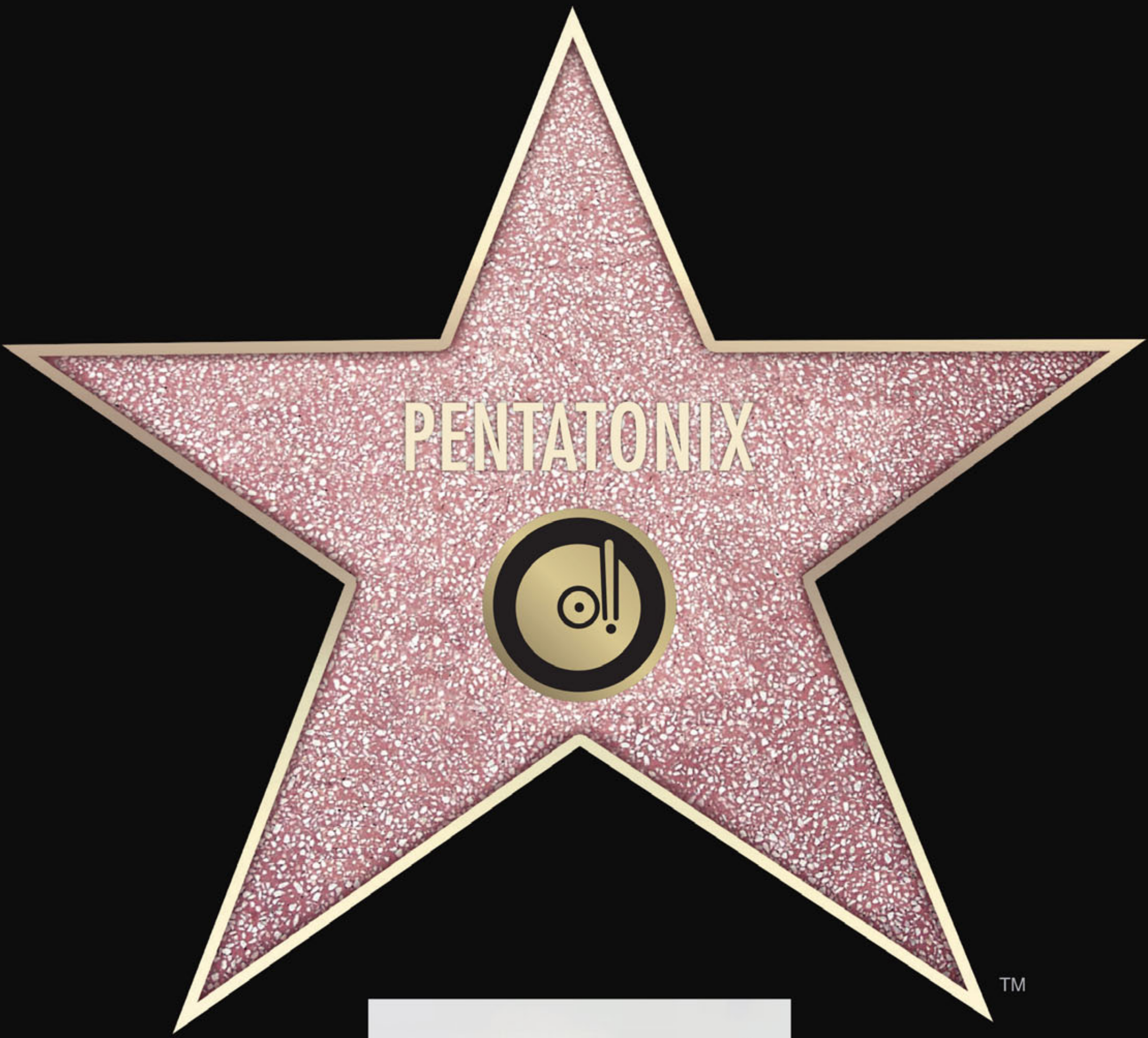

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Directors and writers weigh in on kudos season favorites as the campaign comes down to the wire with the guilds getting ready to select winners including production designer and sound specialists.

Helmers Pick Their Favorites

Directors of seven nominated films talk up challenging scenes ● *By Sharareh Drury and Todd Gilchrist*

Edward Berger

"ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT"

Before director and co-screenwriter Edward Berger's 2022 version, Erich Maria Remarque's "All Quiet on the Western Front" had never been adapted in its native German. The director thrilled at the opportunity to bring it to life for new audiences with a depiction of World War I that captured the brutality and dehumanization of battle. Though he is hard-pressed to call it his favorite scene in the film, Berger says the sequence in which young soldier Paul Bäumer (Felix Kammerer) stabs a French soldier while trying to climb out of a crater on the battlefield is the one he was most gratified to shoot — "because it was so hard to get done," he says.

"We shot it over a period of about three or four days with Felix Kammerer crying nonstop, the camera operator giving everything by lugging the camera around the mud and the prop master wading half marathons through water up to his belly every single day," Berger says. "It was the last scene we shot on the battlefield and we were all so relieved but also incredibly proud when we wrapped it.

"I had rehearsed it in a gym because I was so incredibly nervous about this scene. It is an iconic part in the book so I really wanted to get it right," he says. "Felix brought an incredible depth of emotion and honesty to it. He played it full on in every single camera angle. [But] really only when I saw the film with an audience the first time at the premiere — when I noticed that everyone was holding their breath and absolutely immersed in the action — it was only then that I was able to sit back and realize that it was kind of working."

↓ "All Quiet on the Western Front" director Edward Berger embraces lead actor Felix Kammerer.

Reiner Bajo/Netflix

Todd Field

"TÁR"

In a film where every scene feels like a cinematic or narrative high-wire act, Todd Field says his favorite in "Tár" was the first rehearsal scene with the orchestra. "The aesthetic intent behind the rehearsal scenes had to do with capturing process, the same way one might with a small two-camera documentary team following a real-life conductor in rehearsal," Field tells *Variety*. "We had to plan every set-up weeks in advance with our conducting technical advisor, Natalie Murray Beale, to know precisely where the camera should be for a particular musical bar or phrase."

Due to star Cate Blanchett's previous commitment to another film, Field says he utilized four color-coded camera teams and used a John Madden-like overview, as well as precise continuity sketches, to shoot the scene. "To keep on schedule, it was essential we execute 95 camera set-ups on the very first day," he says. With so many parts moving in limited space in such a short time, Field relied upon his editor, Monika Willi, to know if they'd captured it.

"There was no safety net, no contingency. We had to make our days, or we were finished," he says. "I had to trust Monika Willi when she said 'you have it.' And Monika Willi is someone you can trust."

Joseph Kosinski

"TOP GUN: MAVERICK"

In "Top Gun: Maverick," a film bursting at the seams with (literally) death-defying scenarios, the scene that director Joseph Kosinski was most excited — and apprehensive — to execute was the climactic escape mounted by Pete "Maverick" Mitchell and Bradley "Rooster" Bradshaw. Tom Cruise's fearless pilot is in the cockpit with Miles Teller, who plays the son of his former wingman in the same plane he flew back in the 1986 original. "You have Maverick and Rooster stealing a jet that doesn't fly anymore," he tells *Variety*. "It was a massive challenge that required a lot of movie magic to bring it to life — including pulling an F-14 out of a museum and figuring out how to get it across state lines."

Despite planning the sequence down to the last detail, Kosinski says the assistance of one of the first film's most important contributors led to a change he hadn't anticipated, but gave him the opportunity to insert an additional callback.

"Originally, Maverick was going to chase the fifth-gen fighter into the canyon," says Kosinski. "I got to work with Chris Lebenzon, who is the editor of the original 'Top Gun,' to reorder that sequence so that the fifth-gen fighter would chase Maverick and he pulled the Cobra maneuver in the F-14 to get behind him."

← Martin McDonagh talks with Brendan Gleeson on location during the filming of "The Banshees of Inisherin."

← Baz Luhrmann (left) praised Austin Butler for delivering an "almost out-of-body experience" as Elvis in the biopic.

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↓ Tom Cruise, Joseph Kosinski and Jerry Bruckheimer (center) teamed up for the thrilling "Top Gun" sequel.

Still, Kosinski was not fully confident that he and his collaborators had successfully paid tribute to the original film while telling a new story until the first time he watched it with an audience. "We knew it was something that we were really happy with, but when the sequence was essentially done, we were three months into the COVID lockdown then. So there was really no way to check our work until CinemaCon in 2022 when I was sitting in an audience and watching the finished film for the first time."

Baz Luhrmann

"ELVIS"

Baz Luhrmann's latest feature, "Elvis," was the project for which he faced the most obstacles.

"Just to begin with, we had to contend with fires and floods that shut us down. Then, as the world knows, on a fateful day, my first AD told me that Tom Hanks had what he referred to as 'that cold thing' and we all know what happened next."

Despite a pandemic and natural disasters, Luhrmann's Elvis Presley biopic soldiered on, and that enduring spirit is palpable throughout the film. For instance, Luhrmann recounts a scene in which Austin Butler's Elvis inspires an orchestra "to do his new big sound" before a Las Vegas concert.

"We'd been rehearsing it for almost 18 months to play back, but on the day it was clear that it just didn't have true life to it. In that moment, I said to Austin, 'There is only one way to do this. These are real musicians and you are Elvis. Let's do it for real.' I know that he went through a moment of true panic, but we unmuted all the instruments and what you see on screen is Austin, as Elvis, truly inspiring those musicians to create that sound."

Butler's Oscar-nominated performance also delivered an "almost out-of-body experience" for the cast and crew when he performed his first three numbers in the Vegas showroom.

"I know even people who have worked with me for 30 years said they have never known anything like it, so for sure that would have to be one of my career highlights in terms of on-set shooting."

Martin McDonagh

"THE BANSHEES OF INISHERIN"

Known for his absurdist black humor, Martin McDonagh offers

Banshees of Inisherin: Jonathan Hession/Searchlight Pictures; Elvis: Kane Skennar/Warner Bros.; Top Gun: Maverick: Scott Garfield/Paramount Pictures

a rare and insightful look at male friendship — well, the end of one, anyway — in his latest tragicomedy. Set on a remote Irish isle, “The Banshees of Inisherin” follows the breakup of two lifelong friends, Pádraic (Colin Farrell) and Colm (Brendan Gleeson), and how efforts to rekindle it are rewarded with shocking consequences.

McDonagh favors the first beach scene between Pádraic and Colm, when Pádraic apologizes for a drunken argument the night before. “There was a simplicity to the scene, a quiet two-hander between these great actors,” McDonagh says. “It was mostly about being open to finding the subtle detail in the performances. Also, it was filmed on a gorgeous beach on Inishmore, and I like a nice beach.”

He points out a cinematic nugget in the scene: as Pádraic approaches the beach, there are gravestones in a cemetery on a hill behind him. “Just before we filmed this scene, we shot an earlier scene in that cemetery, Padraic visiting the grave of his parents, then spotting Brendan’s character on the beach. That scene was deleted in the final edit, but I like that the ghost of it remains in this blink-and-you’ll-miss-it detail of gloomy gravestones behind him, foreshadowing the death and darkness to come.”

←

The Daniels’ “Everything Everywhere All at Once” leads the Oscar race with 11 noms.

Ruben Östlund

“TRIANGLE OF SADNESS”

Ruben Östlund’s “Triangle of Sadness” explores the unsurprising but humorous to witness reality of the super-rich — money and privilege go only so far, especially if you’re a bunch of obscenely wealthy jerks stranded on an island. The Cannes Palme d’Or winner is deviously entertaining, with memorable scenes ranging from a sickeningly chaotic dinner to the devastating death of a donkey. When Östlund picked his top scene from the film, the Swiss director opted for his introduction of model couple Carl (Harris Dickinson) and Yaya (Charlbi Dean). The two argue over who should pick up the tab at dinner, with Carl furious that Yaya expects him to pay despite her earning more.

“The reason it was the most meaningful scene to shoot is that it comes straight from my own life experiences when I met my wife,” Östlund tells *Variety*. “One of the things I’m most ashamed about being a man is when my main role is connected with economy. I loved shooting that scene because I love when I cringe myself.”

Östlund says he spent the most time writing and reviewing Carl and Yaya’s argument about money and gender roles as he felt this discussion was “thematically bringing up everything the film is about.”

It came down to test screenings for Östlund to feel he’d fittingly captured this exchange about relationships and money.

“The problem with that scene is my ambition level was so, so high. I knew that content of that scene had great potential. So when I started to cut it, I was not satisfied with the cutting for a long, long time. It was not until I actually saw it with test screenings with an audience that I said, ‘Oh, it’s actually working.’ That was the moment that I felt I got it.”

↓

Charlbi Dean and Harris Dickinson topline Ruben Östlund’s “Triangle of Sadness.”

Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert

“EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE”

Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert describe the weeks of shooting “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” which picked up 11 Oscar nominations, as “a manic schedule of fight scenes and absurd chaos.” For them to select just one scene as a favorite seems like an impossible task. Then again, these two successfully visualized countless parallel universes featuring Michelle Yeoh’s Evelyn in all forms of mad situations — from being a kung fu master and movie star to an insightful googly-eyed rock.

The two decided on the final scene in the parking lot, where Evelyn and Joy (Stephanie Hsu) finally reconcile. “It was incredible to watch Michelle and Stephanie give us such grounded and emotionally raw performances standing in normal clothes in an unremarkable parking lot. Our goal with the film was to create small intimate moments like this that could be strong enough to stand up next to the spectacle of the rest of the film and still hold their own.”

They described the first take as “explosive” as the actors “had built up so much energy and emotion leading up to this scene” and perhaps they needed to tone things down.

“They were heaving together in their embrace, trying to regain composure, for so long that we thought it was too much and left it out of the edit for several cuts. It was only after living with the edit for a while that we realized the film was so big and overwhelming, we needed that long embrace of tears and heaving to properly allow the audience to recover as well.”

Everything Everywhere All At Once: Allyson Riggs/A24; Triangles of Sadness: Neon

ART DIRECTORS GUILD

Announcing Our Nominees!

27th ADG AWARDS

EXCELLENCE IN PRODUCTION DESIGN AWARDS

Outstanding Contribution to Cinematic Imagery
BAZ LUHRMANN AND CATHERINE MARTIN

The William Cameron Menzies Award
GUILLERMO DEL TORO

Lifetime Achievement Award
MICHAEL DENERING • LUIS G. HOYOS • LILLY KILVERT • JANET KUSNICK

Hall of Fame Inductees
TERENCE MARSH • NATACHA RAMBOVA

PRODUCTION DESIGN FOR A FEATURE FILM

PERIOD FILM

ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT
CHRISTIAN M. GOLDBECK

BABYLON
FLORENCIA MARTIN

ELVIS
CATHERINE MARTIN, KAREN MURPHY

THE FABELMANS
RICK CARTER

WHITE NOISE
JESS GONCHOR

FANTASY FILM

AVATAR: THE WAY OF WATER
DYLAN COLE, BEN PROCTER

THE BATMAN
JAMES CHINLUND

BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER
HANNAH BEACHLER

EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE
JASON KISVARDAY

NOPE
RUTH DE JONG

CONTEMPORARY FILM

BARDO, A FALSE CHRONICLE OF A HANDFUL OF TRUTHS
EUGENIO CABALLERO

BULLET TRAIN
DAVID SCHEUNEMANN

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY
RICK HEINRICHS

TÁR
MARCO BITTNER **ROSSER**

TOP GUN: MAVERICK
JEREMY HINDLE

ANIMATED FILM

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO
GUY DAVIS, CURT ENDERLE

LIGHTYEAR
TIM EVATT

MARCEL THE SHELL WITH SHOES ON
LIZ TOONKEL

PUSS IN BOOTS: THE LAST WISH
NATE WRAGG

TURNING RED
RONA LIU

PRODUCTION DESIGN FOR TELEVISION

ONE HOUR PERIOD SINGLE-CAMERA SERIES

THE CROWN
MARTIN CHILDS

THE GILDED AGE
BOB SHAW

THE MARVELOUS MRS. MAISEL
BILL GROOM

PACHINKO:
MARA LEPERE-SCHLOOP

PEAKY BLINDERS
NICOLE NORTHRIDGE

ONE HOUR FANTASY SINGLE-CAMERA SERIES

ANDOR
LUKE HULL

HOUSE OF THE DRAGON
JIM CLAY

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER
RAMSEY AVERY

STRANGER THINGS
CHRIS TRUJILLO

WEDNESDAY
MARK SCRUTON

ONE HOUR CONTEMPORARY SINGLE-CAMERA SERIES

BETTER CALL SAUL
DENISE PIZZINI

EUPHORIA
JASON BALDWIN STEWART

OZARK
DAVID BOMBA

SEVERANCE
JEREMY HINDLE
NICK FRANCONE

THE WHITE LOTUS
CRISTINA ONORI

TELEVISION MOVIE OR LIMITED SERIES

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S CABINET OF CURIOSITIES
TAMARA DEVERELL

MOON KNIGHT
STEFANIA CELLA

OBI-WAN KENOBI
TODD CHERNIAWSKY, DOUG CHIANG

PINOCCHIO
DOUG CHIANG, STEFAN DECHANT

STATION ELEVEN
RUTH AMMON

HALF HOUR SINGLE-CAMERA SERIES

EMILY IN PARIS
ANNE SEIBEL

HACKS
ALEC CONTESTABILE

ONLY MURDERS IN THE BUILDING
PATRICK HOWE

OUR FLAG MEANS DEATH
RA VINCENT

WHAT WE DO IN THE SHADOWS
SHAYNE FOX

MULTI-CAMERA SERIES

BOB ❤ ABISHOLA
FRANCOISE CHERRY-COHEN

THE CONNERS
JERRY DUNN

HOW I MET YOUR FATHER
GLENDA ROVELLO

THE NEIGHBORHOOD
WENDELL JOHNSON

UNITED STATES OF AL
DAREN JANES

COMMERCIALS

AMERICAN HORROR STORIES: "DOLLHOUSE" PROMO
MARC BENACERRAF

BUD LIGHT SELTZER: "LAND OF LOUD FLAVORS"
FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

JUST EAT & KATY PERRY: "DID SOMEBODY SAY"
FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER "TITLE ANNOUNCEMENT"
BRIAN BRANSTETTER

PARAMOUNT+: "WILDLIFE PROMO"
MAIA JAVAN

SHORT FORMAT: MUSIC VIDEO OR WEBSERIES

ADELE "I DRINK WINE"
LIAM MOORE

COLDPLAY X SELENA GOMEZ "LET SOMEBODY GO"
FRANÇOIS AUDOUY

KENDRICK LAMAR "RICH SPIRIT"
SCOTT FALCONER

TAYLOR SWIFT "ANTI-HERO"
ETHAN TOBMAN

TAYLOR SWIFT "BEJEWELED"
ETHAN TOBMAN

VARIETY, REALITY OR COMPETITION SERIES

A BLACK LADY SKETCH SHOW
CINDY CHAO, MICHELE YU

LIZZO'S WATCH OUT FOR THE BIG GRRRLS
JAMES MCGOWAN

RUPAUL'S DRAG RACE
GIANNA COSTA

SATURDAY NIGHT LIVE
KEITH RAYWOOD, EUGENE LEE, AKIRA YOSHIMURA, N. JOSEPH DE TULLIO

WAFFLES +MOCHI'S RESTAURANT
DARCY E. PREVOST

VARIETY SPECIAL

64TH ANNUAL GRAMMY AWARDS
KRISTEN MERLINO

94TH ANNUAL OSCARS
DAVID KORINS

HASAN MINHAJ: THE KING'S JESTER
SCOTT PASK

MILEY'S NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY
KEITH RAYWOOD

TREVOR NOAH: I WISH YOU WOULD
STAR THEODOS KAHN

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↑ In "The Banshees of Inisherin," Colin Farrell's Pádraic deals with the unexpected end of a friendship.

Jonathan Hession/Searchlight Pictures

Breakups, Breakdowns and Bereavement

From 'Banshees of Inisherin' to 'The Fabelmans,' screenwriters wrestle with loss • *By Malina Saval*

From the sharp sting of platonic rejection in "The Banshees of Inisherin," to suicide and self-destruction in "Tár," to death on a sinking cruise ship in "Triangle of Sadness," grief and loss are a collective current running throughout this season's Oscar contenders in the screenplay category.

Inconsolable loss plays out with disastrous, violent consequence in "Banshees," Martin McDonagh's crushing excavation of friendship torn asunder on a remote island off the coast of Ireland in the early 1920s. As the Irish Civil War rages on the mainland, lead protagonist Pádraic, played to eloquent perfection by Oscar nominee Colin Farrell, is consumed with the heartbreak resulting from another catastrophic event: his comrade Colm (Brendan Gleeson, also an Oscar nominee) has suddenly, and without warning, broken off their friendship.

Pádraic is so distraught, he cannot concentrate on anything else. In one scene, he sulks in his rocking chair, his pet donkey Jenny curled on the floor underfoot. Pádraic's sister Siobhán (fellow Oscar nominee Kerry Condon), with whom he lives, barges into their squat, brick house, urging Pádraic to dispatch the animal outdoors. But Pádriac is steadfast, resolute.

"I am not putting me donkey outside when I'm sad, OK?" he tells Siobhán, his eyes glistening with despair.

On the surface, Pádraic is a simple man — unmarried, childless, no remarkable talents of which to speak. But an emotional storm brews beneath that surface. Pádraic is gutted, broken. Isolated and without much of anything else to tether him, Pádraic's menagerie of animals —goats, cows, but mainly donkey Jenny — remain his only solace.

The scene, conveying the bond between mankind and our pets, is ultimately one of great profundity. Colm has jettisoned Pádraic, wanting absolutely nothing to

←
The sudden death of Charlbi Dean (right with Dolly De Leon) cast a mournful shadow over the release of Ruben Östlund's "Triangle of Sadness."

> **“The animals are there I think to sort of quietly, sadly observe this sort of destructive relationship between the two men.”**
> **— Martin McDonagh**

do with him. Jenny is all Pádraic has left.

“The animals in some way were there as not only a friend, but it's almost all Padráic has got to fall back on, apart from his sister, when things go terribly badly,” says McDonagh.

“But also, the animals are there I think to sort of quietly, sadly, observe this sort of destructive relationship between the two men.”

Friendship between two men is a topic rarely dissected in film, and “Banshees” has captured an audience of universal proportions. What happens when a friendship collapses, the experience of that gut wrenching and disorienting demise, is a scenario to which all human beings can relate, notes McDonagh.

“The film has definitely touched a nerve with a lot of people, especially with men, because it's a story that doesn't really get dealt with in the movies, that of male friendship, and the vicissitudes of all that when it can go wrong,” says the writer-director. “It's a film that captures just the sadness of what happens when one person doesn't want to be friends with you anymore. And it's not a romantic thing — it's something that's almost even more unexplainable. In a romantic falling out, you can kind of map where it's gone wrong. Oftentimes, you can get over it more easily, I think, because there are so many other aspects at play. But when it's just a simple friendship, it can be so painful. It makes you reevaluate who you are, how you are seen and what life's all about.”

In “Tár,” how one is viewed by the world, the optics of one's professional and social positioning is what dooms its main character. Todd Field's dizzying portrayal of a world-renowned orchestra conductor and composer (Oscar nominee Cate Blanchett) explores the fiery aftermath of a professional fall from grace. It's a thunderous career crash in the music world that plunges Lydia down a proverbial spiral staircase of angst, loneliness and delusion. She loses her job, she becomes estranged from her wife and child. Eventually, Lydia loses her mind.

Her life, as she knew it, is just gone.

“‘Tár’ is a film centered on the acquisition and attainment of power, and how this shapes and, of course, ultimately distorts an individual,” Field says. “There is most certainly a component of grief with the loss of that power. However, the way this manifests for Lydia may be more akin to something like substance withdrawal. We first meet her standing atop a power structure, a structure carefully crafted around a self-constructed narrative that forms her mask. When the scaffolding of that structure collapses the mask shatters, and all she's left to look at, and hear, is the echo of what was once her true self.”

Sense of self and social status becomes a casualty in “Triangle of Sadness,” which satirizes socioeconomic structure and the modern-day class system as affluent passengers on a ritzy high price-tag cruise ship succumb to their own destruction. As the ocean swallows the ship, these self-absorbed vacationers are too busy preening themselves and counting their money to pay attention to the thrashing waves smashing the vessel's windows. They have lost all sense of humanity — and they are about to lose their lives. So obsessed with wealth and, in some cases, social-media fame, they cannot properly accept they might all die. They refuse to acknowledge — they are incapable of acknowledging — this looming loss.

↓
"Tár" charts the comeuppance of Cate Blanchett's titular conductor.

Triangle of Sadness: Neon; Tar: Focus Features

← In “The Fabelmans,” the eponymous family goes through a dissolution of the parents’ marriage in front of their children.

“There are some quotes that I have been inspired by when doing the filming and one of them is, ‘It’s easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism,’” says “Triangle” writer-director Ruben Östlund, plucking a line from Mark Fisher’s “Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?”

“And when I say capitalism, I mean the kind of harsh, unregulated capitalism,” Ostlund continues. “The market economy itself is not something that is necessarily bad. But as human beings, as soon as we have climbed up the [financial] ladder, we are going to have a hard time climbing down the ladder. And that’s what I was interested in — what happens to these people when they are climbing down.”

When a handful of survivors are marooned on a deserted island, even then they are shocked that their prior places in society no longer serve them in their quest to be rescued. Whatever qualities, luck or confluence of events that enabled them to secure massive material wealth have vanished into the ocean, along with the sunken ship.

“They are at the top of the hierarchy on the yacht, but when they ended up on that deserted island, their abilities that they have that made them successful in business or whatever it was, are not very useful anymore,” says Östlund. “They do not have the basic, practical skills needed to survive. And if you look at modern human beings, very few of us have that ability.”

In a parallel twist of fate, the star of “Triangle of Sadness,” South African-born actor Charlbi Dean, died unexpectedly, just a few short months after the film’s release. That loss, says Östlund, informed, if not the making of the film itself, then what came after — the press, the interviews, the screenings.

“Whenever we have been presenting the film, there’s one person missing on stage every time,” he says. “Of course, this is not comparable with [the grief] of her parents or her friends, and my thoughts go out to them. But there is a feeling of loss.”

Loss also pervades “The Fabelmans,” in which divorce and the dissolution of the nuclear family are the events over which Sammy, its teenage protagonist, grieves. Based loosely on Steven Spielberg’s childhood, the film captures the trauma of that contained family unit deteriorating, and how that process alters the course of Sammy’s adolescence. His mother (played by Oscar nominee Michelle Williams) has run off with her husband’s best friend, Bennie (Seth Rogen), an avuncular figure Sammy has known his entire life. Sammy’s father, Burt (Paul Dano), is depressed and adrift. And Sammy, lacking any steadying force in the way of a parental unit–their split ignites a series of movies to different homes, different states and schools — clings to movies as an emotional anchor.

“The Fabelmans” is dedicated to the memory of Spielberg’s parents, Leah Adler and Arnold Spielberg, who died in 2017 and 2020 respectively. The film is very much a product of grief, of channeling that anguish and sorrow into something that, effectively, can live forever. Because movies, unlike people, extend beyond the realm of the human lifespan.

Tony Kushner, Spielberg’s frequent screenplay collaborator, recalls how his parents’ deaths informed the making of “West Side Story” and, later, “The Fabelmans.”

“Leah had died before we shot ‘West Side Story.’ And then during the time that we were shooting ‘West Side Story,’ Arnold — he was 102 — he was going into a really steep decline,” says Kushner. “And so, Steven was still mourning the loss of his mother and I think bracing himself for the imminent loss of his father. And so there was real grief, and it was kind of an amazing thing to watch Steven on set, learning how he was going to work with those feelings, and make them part of his filmmaking process.”

By the time Kushner and Spielberg co-wrote the screenplay for “The Fabelmans,” Kushner says that grief spun into a mechanism by which to explore the “central theme” of childhood instability.

“If you think about his movies, one of the strongest tensions, the polarities in his films are of danger versus safety,” says Kushner. “There’s this very strong sense of home and security and comfort and family, and also a very powerful sense of the fragility of all of those things and the way that those things are constantly menaced from without.”

Movies, unlike real life, enable human beings to stop time, to conserve that which cannot be kept forever. Movies, says Kushner, are memories preserved onscreen, frozen in time.

“The Fabelmans” is a story of loss, but it’s also a story of hope. Ultimately, it’s a film that functions the way all films do — as a means by way to control the narrative, to control the story, to make sense of that which is, in real life, inscrutable.

What cinema does, at its core, at its most sublime, is make loss somehow bearable.

“The truth of making art is that it does give you an illusion of meaning and understanding that makes you feel that you’re ordering reality and making it something you can control and making it more hospitable and manageable,” says Kushner. “But it is an illusion. And since art is always inclined towards truth, the truth is that life is, in fact, fraught with danger. We’re all mortal and we’re all going to die. Art is always going to pull you. It’ll lead you into safety. And then it’s going to pull you right out of it.”

Merie Weismiller Wallace/Universal Pictures and Amblin Entertainment

KUDOS

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CAS Career Achievement Award

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Filmmaker Award

& ALL 59TH ANNUAL CAS AWARDS NOMINEES & WINNERS

VARIETY

Cast of Characters

The SAG Awards sometimes lead the way for other kudos bodies

● *By Jenelle Riley and Emily Longeretta*

The 29th annual SAG Awards, at which actors honor their peers, is set for 5 p.m. PT/ 8 p.m. ET Feb. 26. While the ceremony will take place at the Fairmont Century Plaza in Los Angeles, the show will be livestreamed on Netflix's YouTube channel for all to watch. *Variety* offers a primer on the kudos and what they portend for other awards.

FILM CATEGORIES

● **How do the SAG Awards line up with Oscars?** Unlike most other kudos bodies, the SAG Awards actually overlap with Academy voters. This is one reason the SAG Awards are often seen as a major precursor to which actors will take home Oscar gold. Last year, the acting categories matched up perfectly between the two shows with all four SAG Award winners taking home Academy Awards. Many point to Jessica Chastain's lead female actor SAG Award win for "The Eyes of Tammy Faye" as a turning point in the race. In 29 years, all four winners have matched perfectly eight times. A three out-of-four matchup is more common, having happened 11 times before.

● **How closely do film nominations match this year?** While winners tend to match up, there have been situations in which an actor won a SAG Award but was not nominated for an Oscar — this happened to Idris Elba, who won male actor in a supporting role for 2015's "Beasts of No Nation." And sometimes the Oscar winner misses at the SAG Awards — most recently Regina King went on to win an Academy Award for 2018's "If Beale Street Could Talk" despite missing out on a SAG Award nomination.

This year finds nominations lining up perfectly in only one category — all the nominees for female actor in a supporting role are also Oscar-nominated. They are Angela Bassett ("Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"), Hong Chau ("The Whale"), Kerry Condon ("The Banshees of Inisherin") and both Jamie Lee Curtis and Stephanie Hsu ("Everything Everywhere All at Once").

In male actor in a leading role, there is a four out of five match between the two bodies with Austin Butler ("Elvis"), Colin Farrell ("Banshees"), Brendan Fraser ("The Whale") and Bill Nighy ("Living"). But Adam Sandler, who was recognized by SAG-AFTRA voters for his work in "Hustle," didn't make the cut at the Oscars. Instead, Paul Mescal earned his first nomination for his performance in "Aftersun."

Both female actor in a leading role and male actor in a supporting role have a three out of five match. For male supporting, Brendan Gleeson and Barry Keoghan ("Banshees") and Ke Huy Quan ("Everything Everywhere") snagged noms from both voters. Paul Dano is SAG Award-nominated for "The Fabelmans" but his co-star Judd Hirsch is nominated at the Oscars. And "The Good Nurse" star Eddie Redmayne received a SAG Award nom but wasn't recognized by the Academy, whose voters opted for Brian Tyree Henry in "Causeway."

↓ "Black Panther: Wakanda Forever" star Angela Bassett earned nominations from both the SAG Awards and the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Annette Brown/Marvel/Disney

The three nominees matching in female lead are Ana de Armas ("Blonde"), Cate Blanchett ("Tár") and Michelle Yeoh ("Everything Everywhere"). Both Viola Davis ("The Woman King") and Danielle Deadwyler ("Till") earned SAG Award nominations, but not Oscar. Rounding out the category at the Academy Awards will be Michelle Williams ("The Fabelmans") and Andrea Riseborough ("To Leslie").

● **Who are the ensemble nominees?** Since its second show in 1995, the SAG Awards have included an award for cast in a motion picture. In 2007, they added stunt ensemble into the mix, as well. Some perceive an ensemble win as a good sign for a film's chances at a best picture Oscar. But while it certainly shows support, that isn't necessarily the case. Two recent films, "Green Book" and "The Shape of Water," won best picture without even landing a SAG Award nomination for ensemble. This year's ensemble nominees include four films that are nominated for best picture: "Banshees," "Everything Everywhere," "The Fabelmans" and "Women Talking." The fifth spot is the cast of "Babylon," Damien Chazelle's ode to 1920s Hollywood.

TV CATEGORIES

● **Why Does SAG-AFTRA matter for TV?** Although the Golden Globes returned this year after last year's nearly nonexistent show, the voting group includes only 199 individuals. The SAG Awards set the stage a bit more for what the TV race looks like overall, as 2,500 randomly selected members of SAG-AFTRA — which includes more than 160,000 people — choose the nominees. In past years, SAG Awards have highlighted series and actors often ignored by other kudos shows as actors recognize the craft in a different way.

A NEW PLATFORM

The awards had been telecast on TNT from 1998 to 2022 and this year, everything changes. Not only will the show not air on TNT amid Warner's changes, it actually won't air on television at all; instead, it will stream on Netflix's YouTube page. In 2024, it will move to the streaming service. And when it comes to the nominees, Netflix's final season of "Ozark" leads the pack with for nominations — drama ensemble and acting noms for Jason Bateman, Laura Linney and Julia Garner.

● **Will 'White Lotus' category change lead to a big win?** When "White Lotus" competed in the limited series category last year, Season 1 stars Jennifer Coolidge and Murray Bartlett lost to Kate Winslet and Michael Keaton, respectively. This time, the show has moved to drama due to Coolidge's return — and could mean that she'll take home the female actor category. It won't be an easy race, as she goes head-to-head against Elizabeth Debicki ("The Crown"), Julia Garner ("Ozark"), Laura Linney ("Ozark") and fan-favorite Zendaya ("Euphoria"). Somehow, no one else from "White Lotus" received solo nominations, but since it moved to drama, it's eligible in the ensemble race for the first time. If there's ever a time to award an ensemble, it's now. Mike White's sophomore season is led by Coolidge, F. Murray Abraham, Meghann Fahy, Jon Gries, Sabrina Impacciatore, Michael Imperioli, Theo James, Aubrey Plaza, Haley Lu Richardson and Will Sharpe, among others.

→ Jennifer Coolidge is in prime position to win for her return in Season 2 of "White Lotus."

Fabio Lovino/HBO

A HAPPY SURPRISE

One thing that SAG-AFTRA voters often do well is recognize the talent that isn't highlighted elsewhere. When FX's "The Patient" came out, it didn't make a big splash but critics recognized just how impressive and unique Steve Carell's performance was. He previously earned nominations for "The Morning Show" and "The Office" (six times) and is now up for lead actor in a limited series or TV movie. It isn't an easy category by far as he goes up against Taron Egerton and Paul Walter Hauser for "Black Bird," Sam Elliott for "1883" and Evan Peters for "Dahmer." Due to the supporting categories at the Golden Globes, both Peters and Walter Hauser took home trophies for "Dahmer" and "Black Bird," respectively.

● **Is 'The Bear' a Beast?** "The Bear" didn't do a giant press tour before its released via FX on Hulu. However, the moment it dropped, the series became a watercooler hit, with Jeremy Allen White taking home the Globe and the Critics Choice trophies. This time, he could do the same at SAG Awards, especially since the others could cancel each other out. He's nominated with "Barry" co-stars Anthony Carrigan and Bill Hader as well as "Only Murders in the Building" leads Steve Martin and Martin Short.

> **SAG-AFTRA voters often recognize talent that isn't highlighted elsewhere. When FX's 'The Patient' came it out, it didn't make a splash but Steve Carell's performance was recognized.**

BAFTA's Efforts to Level the Film Field Bear Some Fruit

Rule tweaks seek to reward the deserving, as well as deliver surprises ● *By Guy Lodge*

The most rewarding moment of last year's BAFTA ceremony came with the presentation of the lead actress award: As Joanna Scanlan was named the winner for her moving turn as a widow uncovering her husband's double life in the British indie "After Love," her visibly emotional reaction was matched by the palpable warmth of the applause. But a large part of the reason it was so memorable was because, in the long run of precursor awards and televised ceremonies that make up Oscar season, this moment belonged to BAFTA alone. Versions of Scanlan's speech hadn't been heard a dozen times before; she wasn't even eligible for prizes Stateside.

This was a case of the British Academy voters honoring one of their own with little regard for their place in the U.S. race. Scanlan's unusual win, however, was only enabled because of a rarer occurrence still: Thanks partially to jury intervention in compiling the nominees, there was zero overlap between the BAFTA and Oscar slates for lead actress, essentially freeing the Brits to go their own way.

There's less chance this year of BAFTA voters going rogue when winners are announced at the Feb.19 ceremomy: across all categories, their nominees feature the presumed Oscar front-runners, though the numbers tilt a little differently here and there. With a whopping 14 noms, the German WWI epic "All Quiet on the Western Front" handily leads the BAFTA field, though Oscar voters didn't go quite that far; their nomination-topper, the delirious multiverse comedy "Everything Everywhere All at Once," settled for eight nominations from BAFTA. These aren't seismic inconsistencies: the other three best film BAFTA nominees, "The Banshees of Inisherin," "Tár" and "Elvis," also all met with equivalent Academy approval. Ditto such hotly fancied actors as Cate Blanchett, Michelle Yeoh, Colin Farrell, Austin Butler, Brendan Fraser, Ke Huy Quan and Angela Bassett.

It's a wide-ranging slate, which is what BAFTA CEO Jane Millichip — after acknowledging that

↓ Lead actor Paul Mescal was nominated for "Aftersun," although the film was shut out of the top category.

A24

"there's always progress to be made" — is most pleased with this year, and attributes to a new voting adjustment that requires members to see a mandatory number of films in randomly assigned groups before voting — designed to counter both biases in viewing selection and ensure all eligible films are seen by a core number of voters.

"I think the new process is actually throwing up another fantastic dimension, which is we're seeing greater breadth in narrative styles and genres as a result of this," she says. "Because the principle of the change was to level the playing field."

BAFTA asserted its own taste most visibly by mostly passing over two best picture Oscar nominees from Tinseltown titans: Steven Spielberg's autobiographical "The Fabelmans," handed a single writing nom, and James Cameron's blockbuster "Avatar: The Way of Water," which managed just two technical bids. Both are American artifacts, steeped in myths or methods of Hollywood movie-making that perhaps don't resonate as deeply with British voters: "Top Gun: Maverick," another emphatically all-American phenomenon that hit big with AMPAS voters, was also limited to technical recognition at BAFTA. The British Academy is by no means averse to American cinema, but maybe there's a limit to the amount of beefy flag-waving they can take.

Yet there isn't much of a local flavor to this year's BAFTA nominees either. The only British production among the best film nominees is Martin McDonagh's Irish-set tragicomedy "The Banshees of Inisherin," though that factor may help spur it to a win; veterans Emma Thompson and Bill Nighy are the only Brits nominated in the lead acting categories, for "Good Luck to You, Leo Grande" and "Living," respectively, though that probably won't be enough to vault them ahead of more loudly hyped front-runners.

Meanwhile, Scottish writer-director Charlotte Wells' wrenching debut "Aftersun," which topped critics' lists on both sides of the pond and swept December's British Independent Film Awards, was shut out of the best film, director and screenplay categories — much to the disappointment of pundits who had hoped BAFTA might foreground a homegrown international success story from the independent sphere. (It managed noms for Irish leading man Paul Mescal and for casting, plus a pair of bids in BAFTA's British-only categories.) "If we aren't championing a film like that on an international scale, what's the point of having our own awards?" says one disgruntled voter.

BAFTA's peculiar status as an awards ceremony that identifies itself both nationally and internationally — unlike, say, the Césars, which are limited to French cinema — is a recurring source of frustration to many members. Some accuse them of being too parochial — this is a group, after all, that solved the great "L.A. Confidential" versus "Titanic" debate of 2007 by voting for "The Full Monty" instead — while others say they don't sufficiently celebrate their homegrown talent.

Certainly, British indie cinema continues to be a blind spot: if "Aftersun" at least got a modicum of recognition, the absence of strong films including Sebastián Lelio's Brechtian faith inquiry "The Wonder," Georgia Oakley's stirring gay-rights drama "Blue Jean" or Frances O'Connor's vibrant literary biopic "Emily" from any general BAFTA categories seems regrettable. If BAFTA's recent expansion of its British film category to 10 nominees seemed in part a transparent attempt to make up for this shortfall — why not the best film category too, after all? — the category still becomes a bit of a sop when one vastly dominant nominee such as "Banshees" will clearly cruise to a win.

This problem was one of several issues of balance and representation that were addressed two years ago when BAFTA radically overhauled its voting system, forming small juries to determine nominees from membership-voted longlists in major categories. The result was a pleasingly adventurous and diverse slate of nominees that paid little mind to the established trends of the season, where female art-house outsiders including Shannon Murphy ("Babyteeth") and Jasmila Žbanić ("Quo Vadis, Aida?") could compete alongside eventual winner Chloé Zhao, or where British indie breakouts Bukky Bakray and Wunmi Mosaku could pip Carey Mulligan to a lead actress nom.

→
Gina Prince-Bythewood cracked the director lineup with "The Woman King."

Ilze Kitshoff/TriStar Pictures

Critics were delighted, while some BAFTA members complained they'd been taken out of their own voting process. BAFTA has responded over the past two years by tweaking the rules slightly to accommodate a balance of popular voting and jury curation: This year's tasteful but somewhat less boldly idiosyncratic nominees reflect the results of that listening and adjusting, though the system still permits the odd bracing surprise, such as Thompson's "Leo Grande" co-star Daryl McCormack landing in the lead actor race, or Gina Prince-Bythewood beating the odds to a directing nomination.

That Prince-Bythewood is the only female nominee to crack the director lineup, from a longlist designed to be gender-equal, is a disappointment; in the past two years, women filled at least half those slots. Is more tweaking in order, or is BAFTA content at this point to let the chips fall where they may?

"I think that there are always adjustments to be made," says Millichip. "It'll take us a little while to reflect on this year's nominations and the whole process to make sure that we are relevant and representative. And so we will meet this summer and look again to see if it does need tweaking. We have to make sure that the intervention is sufficient to ensure that we've got proper representation, but that there's still a still a strong trust in the fact that the nominations are made on their merits."

If BAFTA's current approach, then, seems to be one of two steps forward and one step back, that's still forward movement in the long run. In the meantime, members will cross fingers for at least a few winners as refreshing as they are deserving.

TIPSHEET

WHAT: 2023 EE BAFTA Film Awards
WHEN: Feb. 19
WHERE: Southbank Centre, London
WEB: bafta.org

THE
EE BAFTA FILM AWARDS

Hosted by Richard E. Grant & Alison Hammond

SUNDAY 19 FEBRUARY

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DGA Awards Celebrate 75 Years

Diamond anniversary sees inclusive changes, updated awards and a hopeful outlook ● *By Karen M. Peterson*

↑ **The DGA will rename its first-time feature trophy to honor former president Michael Apted.**

Byron Gamarro

The Directors Guild of America celebrates its 75th year, the org will rename an award for one of its own.

The first-time feature award is getting a new name. “I am very excited because we are doing something that we haven’t done before, a special presentation and renaming one of our awards in honor of former DGA president Michael Apted,” says DGA president Lesli Linka Glatter.

At the February ceremony, the DGA will formally change the name. The director of “Coal Miner’s Daughter” and “Gorillas in the Mist” had a long history with the guild. In 1998, he led the formation of the Independent Directors Committee to foster the careers and rights of indie filmmakers. He served as DGA president from 2003-09, and created the first-time feature award that will now bear his name.

“I think Michael would be so happy about this because it was so dear to him. He really championed excellence and new vision,” says Glatter.

The prize, first awarded in 2015, is a way to lift up diverse voices and emerging artists. “This is a way to be authentically inclusive because it gives opportunities to highlight and celebrate all independent filmmakers, but particularly women and directors of color who are creating their first features.”

In total, 14 women have been nominated, including four this year. In terms of inclusion, more than half of all nominees in this category have been members of underrepresented groups.

The Directors Guild of America returns Feb. 18 to the Beverly Hilton for the 75th DGA Awards. Judd Apatow will host the ceremony for the fourth time, in an evening that will highlight directors across the scope of film and television. Guild president Lesli Linka Glatter tells *Variety*, “In this team sport of ours, we want to celebrate our UPMs [unit production managers], our first assistant directors, our associate directors, stage managers. Everyone who is part of creating the story.”

This year, the DGA will present its lifetime achievement award to Robert Fishman, a legendary director of live sporting events. Fishman will be the fifth television director to receive this recognition. In his 50 years at CBS, he has directed 39 NCAA Final Four broadcasts, 27 US Open Tennis Championships, 21 Daytona 500s, and three Olympic Winter Games.

“When people think about getting the lifetime achievement award in television, it has been in drama or comedy or commercials,” Glatter says. “We represent news and sports at the DGA. … We want to represent all our categories.”

To continue the theme of celebrating all levels of directing, assistant director Mark Hansson will receive this year’s Frank Capra Achievement Award and Valdez Flagg will receive the Franklin J. Schaffner Achievement Award. These specially designated awards recognize assistant directors, stage managers, and associate producers for their career achievements both to the industry and the guild.

Empowering and fostering creative talent are important points to Glatter, who has served as DGA president since 2021. Through programs such as the directors development initiative, launched in 2016, today’s Directors Guild looks much different than it did when she started out in the 1980s.

“When I started directing, there were so few [women]. The prevailing feeling back then in the dark ages was that there was only room for one of us, and it better be me.” But that attitude didn’t work for Glatter. “I don’t believe it’s true.”

Today, the DGA works tirelessly to strengthen the voices and support for all members. The guild has seven committees dedicated to diversity, each with its own unique focus. These committees help meet the needs of women, as well as African American, Latino and Asian American members.

After receiving unanimous support from the board last year, the DGA formed an LGBTQ+ committee. The newly elected board includes notable industry voices Paris Barclay, Kimberly Peirce, Cheryl Dunye, Jamie Babbit and Lee Daniels. The specific goals of the committee are still to be set, but Glatter explains their overall charge. “

This is a committee dedicated to advancing and empowering the professional interests of the LGBTQ+ members and promoting and working for employment equity throughout the entertainment business.”

Moving in 2023 and beyond, the DGA faces new opportunities and challenges. Soon they will begin the process of negotiating a new contract. While it is too soon to specify details, Glatter says, “What we’re committed to is fighting for our entertainment industry. We want fair, safe, equitable, sustainable, things that are accessible for all.”

Some of the issues important to the guild include wages, streaming residuals, creative rights, funding for health and pension plans, and safety on the set. There is no timeline for when contract negotiations begin. “We need to make a great deal for our members,” says Glatter. “We will only begin bargaining when we believe we have the most leverage to win the best possible deal for DGA directors and their teams.”

TIPSHEET

WHAT: 75th DGA Awards
WHEN: Feb. 18
WHERE: Beverly Hilton
WEB: dga.org

Production Designers on Production Designers

↑ Production design choices on "Glass Onion" helped reveal the characters' true motivations.

John Wilson/Netflix

Pros share insights into the work of this year's Art Directors Guild nominees

Period Feature Film

THE FABELMANS

PRODUCTION DESIGNER RICK CARTER

In Steven Spielberg's film about his childhood and finding his identity as an artist, the challenge for Rick Carter and his crew was how to tell the story visually. He used the Fabelman family's three homes as primary reference points, with their different architectural styles and decorative elements adding nuance as the family moves from one house to another — with each member progressing through his or her own story. Sammy Fabelman's uncle Boris voices the boy's inner struggle as he faces the conflicts between artistic aspirations and family life: "Art will give you crowns in heaven and laurels on earth. But it will tear your heart out."

— Chuck Parker

Fantasy Feature Film

BLACK PANTHER: WAKANDA FOREVER

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: HANNA BEACHLER

Hanna Beachler fully realized civilizations writ new with the invention of whole new technologies. We see stunning visuals with textures, colors and a dynamic language that is both a fantasy and somehow entirely believable. She and her team have designed a mature and progressive world of the imagination that exists in the present, in the nation of Wakanda and in a glorious world below the sea — backed by an international and massive art department that supports her imagination for a story that breaks out of the comic book and onto the big screen."

— John Iacovelli

Contemporary Feature Film

GLASS ONION: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: RICK HEINRICHS

Seamlessly transitioning from location, to stage, to VFX, is a hallmark of the inventive Rick Heinrichs and his team who create the ultimate "destination," while giving intrigue and multilayered character touches to the complex puzzle of this murder mystery. They use the visual metaphor of onion layers manifested in the impressive resort's architecture to peel and reveal the true motivations of the guests. The production design choices combine to create a strong sense of place – and to service the narrative all the way to a shattering conclusion"

— Nelson Coates

Animated Feature Film

GUILLERMO DEL TORO'S PINOCCHIO

PRODUCTION DESIGNERS: CURT ENDERLE AND GUY DAVIS

Guy Davis and Curt Enderle guided a team of designers, craftspeople and animation artists in Portland, Ore.; Guadalajara, Mexico; and Altrincham, England; who brought to life Guillermo del Toro's vision. The director's goal was to create a movie that has the expressiveness and material nature of a handmade piece of animation that is a beautiful artisanal exercise in carving, painting, and sculpting, but which incorporates a new sophistication of movement made possible by extensive research on rigs and puppetry – achieving new heights in stop-motion animation.

— Judy Cosgrove

One-Hour Period Single-Camera Series

PACHINKO, "CHAPTER ONE"

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: MARA LEPERE-SCHLOOP

"Pachinko" navigates an immersive journey of three distinct eras: 1915 Korea during the Japanese occupation, 1989 New York in high finance and Osaka around the same era. Each period has its own feel so that its captivating environment engrosses you, and you know right where you are. Production design plays a key role in depicting the world of Busan and captures the vibrancy and hope of main character Sunja's life. Her parents' boarding house reflects the poverty of being left penniless due to the country's occupation while retaining a warm, inviting atmosphere.

— Dave Blass

One-Hour Fantasy Single-Camera Series

THE LORD OF THE RINGS: THE RINGS OF POWER, "ADAR"

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: RAMSEY AVERY

What a challenge to bring this world to life in a fresh, vibrant way yet keep it familiar for fans. Ramsey Avery successfully gives us lands that are beautifully majestic and thriving. His clever use of textures works wonderfully with the costumes, and the lighting offers us a rich visual experience. The Orcs prison camp in the "Adar" episode has irregular-shaped pieces of burlap, muslin and aged, stained skin-like fabric stretched across the roof; they are lit from above with an amber hue so the frayed ropes and rough texture of the fabric help create a dramatic, foreboding setting.

— Claire Bennett

One-Hour Contemporary Single-Camera Series

SEVERANCE, "GOOD NEWS ABOUT HELL"

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: JEREMY HINDLE

What's not to love about the way scenery is used to inform a puzzle and frame a mystery in "Severance?" Endless white hallways oddly entice seduction. Sparseness and wide spaces are not wasted but carefully orchestrated. Organization, line work, and symmetrical rhythms evoke nostalgia and perpetuate continuous questioning: "Where the hell is this story taking place?" Homes are darkly manicured, curious places set-dressed with hyper attention. Each object matters and pulses a purpose that deepens the puzzle.

— Adam Rowe

Television Movie or Limited Series

STATION ELEVEN

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: RUTH AMMON

nary whether it be a person, place, or thing. Storytelling and visuals that move seamlessly forward and backward in time. All are fantastic and painfully real in this nightmare journey towards survival. The design team was tasked with visualizing a world gone very dark while reinforcing truth wherever it can be found. Noble rot can also manifest hope and beauty. Bravo to all for creating a picture not dependent on huge sci-fi budgets while making it appear alive, real and compelling.

— Thomas A. Walsh

Half-Hour Single-Camera Series

ONLY MURDERS IN THE BUILDING: "FRAMED"

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: PATRICK HOWE

With New York's Arconia building, Patrick Howe has masterfully created a detailed scenic environment in which a few layers get peeled back in this flashback-dotted episode. The reveal this season is the catacomb sets throughout the building, including hidden elevators and voyeuristic peepholes. His use of pattern stacking in walls and furniture textures paints a specific vision of our septuagenarian characters. He continues to take us on a scenic ride yet still peels back more layers with each episode.

— Korey Washington

Multi-Camera Series

BOB HEARTS ABISHOLA, "INNER BOSS BITCH," "TWO RUSTY TRACTORS," "ESTEE LAUDER AND GOAT MEAT"

PRODUCTION DESIGNER: FRANCOISE CHERRY-COHEN

"Bob Hearts Abishola's" fourth season brings to the screen vibrant sets that perfectly match the energy of this hilarious sitcom. From the office of an "Inner Boss Bitch," dripping in color, to an industrial bar dazzling with Edison bulbs, there's always a feast for the viewer. If not for the laugh track, one would almost forget it's a multicam show due to the excellent use of foreground elements and the dynamic layouts of sets. Cherry-Cohen showcases a mastery of texture and materials by giving even a barren warehouse the same warmth seen throughout the show.

— Madeline O'Brien

Variety, Reality or Competition Series

A BLACK LADY SKETCH SHOW, "ANYBODY HAVE SOMETHING I CAN FLOG MYSELF WITH?" "BOUNCE THEM COOCHIES, Y'ALL!" "PEACHES AND EGGPLANTS FOR ERRBODY!"

PRODUCTION DESIGNERS: MICHELE YU AND CINDY CHAO

Michele Yu and Cindy Chao deliver varied and dynamic environments with limited resources and a tiny crew. Sets range from a soap opera-esque "Real Housewives" mansion, to a crazy singles mixer hall, to a gothic styled living room, and are filled with comic details and meaningful references. In the jewelry heist sketch, the paintings are by Black female artists and the outfits from Black female stylists — celebrating Black women's creativity. If you look close enough you can see through-lines of a cinematic universe with an overarching mythical interconnection of the characters and each sketch in every set.”

— Miranda Cristofani

TIPSHEET

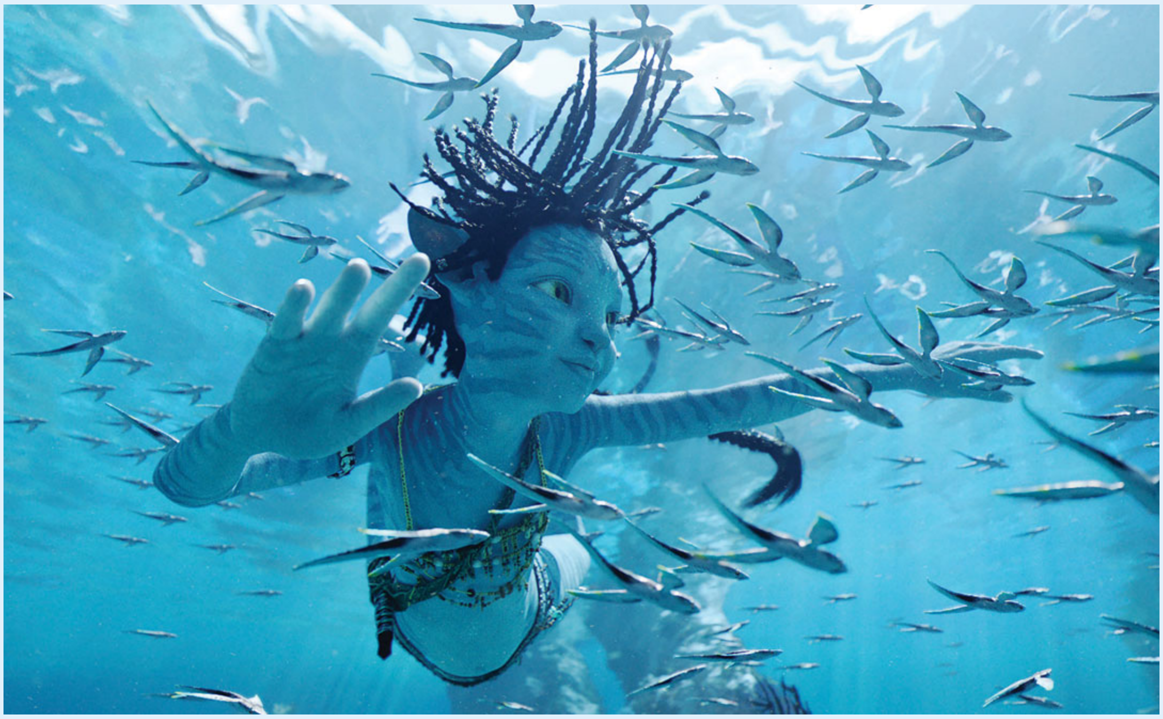
WHAT: 27th ADG Awards
WHEN: Feb. 18
WHERE: Intercontinental Los Angeles Downtown
WEB: adg.org

↓ The rich production design in "Bob Hearts Abishola" is unusual for a multi-cam sitcom.

Michael Yarish/CBS

Lights, Camera, Sound!

The Cinema Audio Society Awards will showcase tuneful music and visceral aural effects ● *By Daron James*



↑ “Avatar: The Way of Water” used sound to define undersea creatures.

20th Century Studios

Dialogue may be king when it comes to a story’s clarity, but it’s the music and audio effects that create a resonating connection with the audience. That’s why we can be frightened in a shower (thanks a lot Bernard Hermann and your strident violins in “Psycho”), or imagine a flesh-eating shark simply by hearing the relentless duuuunnnn duun beat in “Jaws,” or get goose bumps when we hear a T-rex roar in the “Jurassic Park” franchise.

This year’s crop of Cinema Audio Society (CAS) nominees carry on the rich tradition of shaping the aural palette that immerses viewers in the emotional touchstones of the narrative.

“Big tentpole movies are back, demanding their proper place in movie theaters,” says re-recording mixer and CAS president Karol Urban. “Sound is making full use of technologies like Dolby Atmos and Dolby Vision to enhance the viewer experience.”

Among the films nominated for this year’s CAS Awards: “Avatar: The Way of Water,” in which sound helps define creatures, including the whale-like tulkun, long-necked ilu and amphibious skimwing.

“We really wanted to make sure the characters in the water matched the sonic imprint of their movements,” says re-recording mixer Christopher Boyes. “We wanted the ambience itself to not be distracting but be supportive without stepping on or muddying the music.”

With nominee “Top Gun: Maverick,” music and sound effects supplemented the dialogue-driven story.

“Every line of dialogue had to be clear because the narrative had to be so strong emotionally,” says re-recording mixer Chris Burdon. “That allowed everything to wrap around it … at times, the music would take over the whole soundscape, or the sound effects would overpower to bring muscularity or danger … edge-of-the-seat stuff.”

On “Elvis,” music performances were either sung by actor Austin Butler or the vocals were mixed with the sound of Elvis Presley, depending on the period of the singer’s life.

“Every track had to be pushing the story forward,” says re-recording mixer Wayne Pashley. “They had to be relevant to the character and the relationship between Elvis and Col. Tom Parker [played by Tom Hanks].”

Re-recording mixer Frank Montaño of “Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio” says the challenge was balancing the major musical numbers and action sequences. “The way we handled them was to focus on hand-offs between music and effects as well as transitions between sequences,” he says. “In the case of the song ‘Ciao Papa,’ those transitions were made by pre-lapping and post-lapping the atmosphere and effects, then ghosting the effects, making that moment more musical.”

“Carole King & James Taylor: Just Call Out My Name,” was mostly a concert movie, says re-recording mixer Gary Rizzo. “The approach was to make a sonic treat for the fans who tune in at home so they can experience it as close as possible to them being on tour. We dug into the multitrack live recordings, and it was very much like mixing a concert album, but in surround sound.”

In the documentary “Hallelujah: Leonard Cohen, a Journey, a Song,” sound subliminally connected the material with a matching sonic treatment. “We had these different archival sources coming together where Leonard is playing the role of a narrator,” says re-recording mixer Scott Lewis. “We placed a reverb on him [as the] glue that tied everything together.”

Host and comedian Ben Gleib plans to make the CAS awards a memorable evening. He may even sing a show tune or two.

TIPSHEET

WHAT: 59th Annual Cinema Audio Society Awards
WHEN: March 4
WHERE: InterContinental Los Angeles Downtown
WEB: cinemaaudiosociety.org

New Tools Create New Worlds

Visual Effects Society honors cutting-edge visuals and emerging technology ● *By Karen Idelson*

The Visual Effects Society is celebrating awards season with an evening that features an unprecedented number of nominations for one film, a significant new awards category and a changing of the guard at the top of the organization.

“Avatar: The Way of Water” received a whopping 14 nominations, breaking the record of 13 noms for “The Mandalorian” in 2021. The film was nommed for a diverse array of work, including animated character in a photoreal feature and outstanding created environment in a photoreal feature. The first “Avatar” earned 11 nominations in 2010.

“The thing about ‘Avatar 2’ that strikes a chord is that Jim [Cameron, the director] knows how to tell a story; the technology he uses to tell that story is beside the point,” says Jeffrey A. Okun, VES fellow and VFX supervisor. “So, when visual effects people are looking at the work, the first thing that comes to them is whether it is elevating the story in an invisible way. [Jim] doesn’t settle for less than what he has in his mind.”

This year, VES also introduces a category — emerging technology — which aims to spotlight technological leaps that help artists realize the overall vision of a project. “Avatar 2” made a predictably strong showing here, taking three of the five nominations, as Cameron is known for aggressively developing cutting-edge film tools. The movie’s water toolset, facial systems and depth compositing all received noms.

“Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio” also caught the attention of VES, earning six noms and making it the most nominated contender among animated films. The stop-motion project used advanced 3D printing techniques, and two characters from the movie were singled out for noms for animated character in an animated feature: Pinocchio and Geppetto.

“I think that it shows that even the oldest techniques can be modernized,” says Sebastian Sylvan, a VES fellow and chair of the VES Technology Committee, which was instrumental in introducing the award. “You can add creativity and technological advancements to all of the techniques that are used every day for making these fantastic movies and these images. You can even advance areas that haven’t been touched in a very long time.”

At this year’s ceremony, VES welcomes new executive director Nancy Ward. She succeeds Eric Roth, who served almost 19 years at the post before retiring in September. Ward is the first woman to hold that position since the VES was started in 1997.

“I see my role as a collaborative leader to serve the board of directors in all their initiatives in growing the society and we’re looking forward to elevating our standing in the entertainment industry, providing continuing education for our members,” Ward says. “We’d like to mentor the next generation of leadership within our organization, and to mentor the next generation of practitioners, while expanding our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.”

During the pandemic, even as the need for content reached higher levels, there was a shortage of VFX workers. Ward aims to help attract new pros to the field and boost diversity. “One of our key initiatives is to elevate and uplift the women who are currently in the industry as well as to attract people of color and those with varying abilities,” Ward says. “There are a million career avenues within visual effects that would be wonderful to explore.”

TIPSHEET
WHAT: 21st Visual Effects Society Awards
WHEN: Feb. 15
WHERE: Beverly Hilton
WEB: vesglobal.org

↓
For “Guillermo del Toro’s Pinocchio,” the film’s VFX team updated old techniques, such as using 3D printing.

Netflix

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REVIEWS

Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania

By Owen Gleiberman

●

FILM REVIEW

Director: Peyton Reed

Starring: Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly, Jonathan Majors

Paul Rudd and Jonathan Majors star as Ant-Man and Kang the Conqueror in the Marvel Studios film.

Jay Maidment/Marvel/Disney

"Ant-Man," released eight years ago, was a comic book movie that almost inadvertently used its hyper-miniaturized cowboy-on-ant-back superhero as a metaphor for what a tiny place the film itself occupied in the MCU. "Ant-Man and the Wasp" (2018) was a bit less small. The director, Peyton Reed, who had a background in human comedy ("Down With Love," "Bring It On"), expanded the sequel into a puckish fantasy of scale, with characters and objects popping back and forth in size, though the result was still more amusing than momentous. Paul Rudd's nice-guy divorced dad turned badass metallic bug Scott Lang may have been an official Avenger, but that still didn't give him more than a flyweight significance.

Now, though, with "Ant-Man and the Wasp: Quantumania," the "Ant-Man" series has gone Full Marvel. The new movie takes place almost entirely in the Quantum Realm, a mutating subatomic sphere that exists outside our space-time continuum. It's essentially an anything-goes FX playground that resembles a psychedelic album cover crossed with a 21st-century update of "Fantastic Voyage" (lots of things that look like corpuscles). What it feels like, most directly, is a planet from one of the later "Star Wars" films, with a few old-school Cantina vibes. (You could make a case that the George Lucas prequels represented the takeover of "Star Wars" by the Cantina.)

In "Quantumania," there are sci-fi "Alice in Wonderland" forests, full of manta-ray moths and tiny tentacled suns as well as characters who resemble giant stalks of broccoli, walking Jell-O sculptures and glowing TV consoles. There's an army of super-ant saviors. There is, of course, a hooded rebel alliance, as well as a cosmic genocidal megalomaniac — Kang the Conqueror (Jonathan Majors), a supervillain who made his debut in the comics in 1963 and looks like he's being set up to dominate the MCU until 2063. There's Bill Murray, coiffed like a debauched George Washington, as a former rebel who now works for Kang. There's Corey Stoll's Darren, the corporate baddie from the first "Ant-Man," who returns in the form of M.O.D.O.K., a huge malevolent head encased in tin-pot armor with insect hands and legs. The character is another comics stalwart, but given the pointedly cheeky way his scenes are staged, you might say that Reed has merged his sense of humor with a dash of Taika Waititi's dada absurdism.

Reed, at the same time, is out to conjure the deadly gravitas of an "Avengers" epic. Vast populations, whole *strands* of the multiverse, are at stake. Yet since "Quantumania" claims to be a film about the manipulation of matter, we should probably ask right upfront: With everything going on in this movie, does any of it actually matter?

Yes and no. "Quantumania" is a state-of-the-art exercise in world-building, and in the never-ending fantasy world (namely, ours) that was built by J.R.R. Tolkien and Dungeons & Dragons and "Star Wars" and "Harry Potter" and sandbox video games and Lego assembly kits that can number 10,000 pieces, it's worth noting how axiomatic it is that when people today use the term "world-building," they intend it as a high compliment. Another world! Another fun place for us to play in!

"Quantumania" *is* fun, as well as bedazzling, relentless and exhausting, then fun again just when you think you've had enough. The Marvel films have never pretended to be standalone entities, yet I've rarely encountered a Marvel adventure that's *this* busy with a do-or-die saving-the-cosmos plot that feels *this* much like it exists simply to set up the next dozen chapters of something. But that's what happens when you're launching Phase 5 of the Marvel takeover of movie entertainment. "Quantumania" is no cheat (it sucks you in, hooks your eyeballs, wrings you out), but if this is what Phase 5 looks like, God save us from Phases 6, 7 and 8.

Scott's science-prodigy daughter, Cassie (Kathryn Newton), now a plucky young woman of 18, has built some sort of meta telescope in the basement. Within minutes, the device sucks everyone to the Quantum Realm — Scott and Cassie, along with Scott's bug-superhero partner and paramour, Hope van Dyne (Evangeline Lilly), and Hope's parents, the crusty physicist and former S.H.I.E.L.D. agent Hank Pym (Michael Douglas) and the original Wasp, Janet van Dyne (Michelle Pfeiffer), who in the previous film was rescued after having spent 30 years down there. It turns out that she was doing more than passing the time watching Netflix. She was there when Kang first showed up as a stranded traveler — but, in fact, he was already an exile who'd been kicked to the Quantum Realm to halt his path of destruction. Janet blew up the core of Kang's quantum device, which saved the multiverse. But she's still regarded by the rebels with mistrust. And Kang hasn't gone away; his designs have just been put on hold.

Inhabiting a character very much like Thanos, but with no motion-capture makeup to hide behind, Jonathan Majors holds you with the quiet force of his pensive scowl. This actor has the kind of power that comes from consciousness. He's stately and ominous, like Darth Vader played by Norman Mailer. You hang on his every word; he makes vengeance and genocide sound like the most hypnotically casual of propositions. Yet no one could deny that we've been here before.

Rudd's Scott, introduced by John Sebastian's "Welcome Back, Kotter" theme, is presented as a complacent celebrity superhero who needs to be goosed into action. There's a terrific scene in which he gets replicated and has to face down — and ultimately work with — a horde of his multiple selves. The scene allows Rudd to get seriously addled, which is when he's at his best in "Quantumania." But when Scott, now a giant version of himself, trashes Kang's fascist metropolis like Godzilla, all I could think was: What, exactly, are the rules here? The script, by former "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" and "Rick and Morty" writer Jeff Loveness, is making up the rules as it goes along, which is why "Quantumania" whisks you through its visually zapping action without generating any deep investment in it. In a way, the ultimate investment is offscreen: Will the film successfully launch Phase 5? To even wonder about the answer is to miss that the only real conqueror in "Quantumania" is the MCU.

CREDITS: A Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures release of a Marvel Studios production. **Producers:** Kevin Feige, Stephen Broussard. **Executive producers:** Louis D'Esposito, Victoria Alonso, Kevin de la Noy. **Director:** Peyton Reed. **Screenplay:** Jeff Loveness. **Camera:** Bill Pope. **Editors:** Adam Gerstel, Laura Jennings. **Music:** Christophe Beck. MPA Rating: PG-13. **Running time:** 123 MIN. **Cast:** Paul Rudd, Evangeline Lilly, Jonathan Majors, Michelle Pfeiffer, Michael Douglas, Bill Murray, Kathryn Newton, Corey Stoll, William Jackson Harper, Katy O'Brian

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The Company You Keep

By Daniel D'Addario

Catherine Haena Kim and Milo Ventimiglia star in "The Company You Keep."

Eric McCandless/ABC

TV REVIEW

Drama: ABC (10 episodes; 2 reviewed); Feb. 19

Starring: Milo Ventimiglia, Catherine Haena Kim, William Fichtner

After six seasons, Milo Ventimiglia — a star who began his career as Stars Hollow's resident hellion on "Gilmore Girls" — is freed up from playing the benevolent patriarch on "This Is Us." And, at least in theory, his new series brings together the two halves of his TV career. On ABC's "The Company You Keep," based on the Korean series "My Fellow Citizens," Ventimiglia plays a con artist, but one who's utterly committed to his parents (William Fichtner and Polly Draper) and adult sister (Sarah Wayne Callies). The conflict between obligations to loved ones and the desire to get out of the game creates tension and interest in the show's first two episodes, as does genuine chemistry with co-star Catherine Haena Kim.

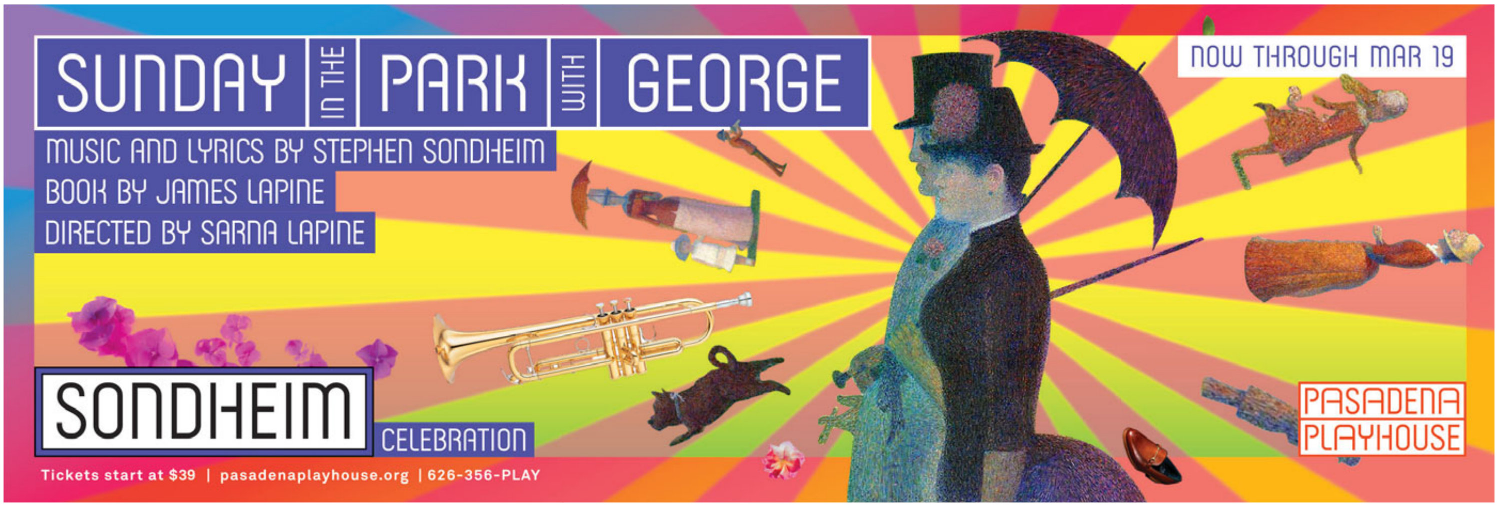
It's less a critique than a simple description of the network-drama form to note that the relationship between the two leads is a tidy double game. Meeting by chance, Ventimiglia's Charlie and Kim's Emma share a night of intimacy during which they conceal their true identities: He's a professional liar, and in a sense, so is she. Emma is an undercover CIA operative, currently assigned to root out the criminal mastermind who owns Charlie's family's debts and is making them miserable. Compellingly, she has insecurities that overlay Charlie's own: He's responsible for financially supporting his parents, while she feels like the black sheep of a political dynasty that sees itself as the Korean answer to the Kennedys.

With this premise established, there's room to explore the relationship, and outside it. Some of the writing of Emma's and Charlie's dialogue leans painfully hard on the fact that they're at once intrigued by one another and lying through their teeth, as when she admits, "With you, there is no hiding. ... Sometimes it feels like you can see through me." There's dramatic irony, and then there's elbowing the audience in the ribs so hard you may leave a bruise. Still, the performers sell the mutual attraction and the tricky sense of knowing one is understood beyond one's lies and elisions; Fichtner and Draper are in fine form, as is Callies.

This trio's work with Ventimiglia anchors the sprightlier half of "The Company You Keep." Charlie and his folks don't run cons together simply as a way to leverage their talents to make money: They are in it, in part, for love of the game. The second episode, in which Fichtner's Leo takes on the character of a ludicrous society photographer to gain access to the home of a wealthy couple, has some of the high-kicking brio of the late, lamented ABC spy drama "Alias," albeit obviously executed on a less ambitious scale. Even so, that "The Company You Keep" treats its characters as intelligent — capable not merely of pulling off a con but of designing one that uses their ingenuity and their humor — feels like a breath of fresh air.

And it's a color that looks good on Ventimiglia, for whom a certain husky-voiced stoicism can be a crutch as much as it is a defining trait. He certainly seems to be having fun, which, as a performer, he's earned after what was likely a creatively rewarding but emotionally wrenching journey through family tragedy "This Is Us." It also represents something new for his audience, which has little recent experience of a Ventimiglia who's uncomplicatedly breezy or sexy outside the context of a very complicated marriage. Here, the knots in Charlie's stories are the stuff of pulp novels or — just as good — lightly pleasurable serial TV.

CREDITS: Executive producers: Julia Cohen, Phil Klemmer, Milo Ventimiglia, Russ Cundiff, Jon M. Chu, Caitlin Foito, Todd Harthan, Lindsay Goffman. 60 MIN. **Cast:** Milo Ventimiglia, Catherine Haena Kim, William Fichtner, Tim Chiou, Freda Foh Shen, James Saito, Sarah Wayne Callies, Felisha Terrell, Polly Draper



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Madelyn Cline

"With any character, I'm approaching them with empathy and figuring out the why."

By Emily Longeretta

Bonnie Nichoalds

When "Outer Banks" premiered in spring 2020, Madelyn Cline's life transformed overnight. Her character, Sarah Cameron — John B's love interest and "the princess of the Kooks" — has changed almost as much as Cline herself. While she gears up for the release of the teen drama's third season, out Feb. 23, she's also starring in another Netflix hit: Rian Johnson's "Glass Onion: A Knives Out Mystery."

● **How has Sarah Cameron changed since viewers last saw her?** We've seen her truly grow up a lot. She's gone from a teenager who doesn't have much of a care in the world or responsibilities to having the weight of so many things on her shoulders. She's learned that family is not just something that you are born into but something that you can choose. She's learning to speak up for herself, put her foot down, and learning to discern what is right and wrong versus right or wrong being something that you're told. This season, we continue to piggyback on that with a few wrenches thrown into the mix. She found this voice, and she's learning how to make decisions for herself.

● **What's your process of tapping into that?** What it comes down to is finding the empathy for me, because sometimes I'll read things, and me, personally, as Maddie, will be like, "What the fuck?" With any character, I'm approaching them with empathy and figuring out the why. Moral dilemmas are really fun to play because there's so much there. I just hope that what I've portrayed feels truthful and authentic. But truthfully, that ebbing and flowing and growing, especially that we experience as teenagers and young adults, I hope that resonates true to our audience. I think that it's all very human — finding your chosen family, realizing that mistakes happen and the ins and the outs of relationships and friendships. Life in and of itself is so messy, and it's very cathartic and beautiful to play.

● **"Glass Onion" has been so huge. Are you more like that film's Whiskey or like Sarah?** Listen, Whiskey is an influencer. I have been known to influence or at least attempt to. I wouldn't say that I'm similar to one or the other. I think there are certain aspects of myself I've definitely put into both. I really, really loved playing Whiskey because she was a little bit more outside of my comfort zone. She's a little wild card; she's got her own ulterior motive. She's multifaceted and was really fun to play and explore. I don't know if I would say more of one or the other. I'll ask my therapist. She knows me more than I know me!

● **You've talked about being patronized for being "too sexy" or showing your body, and Whiskey and Sarah are both so confident. How do you go about finding that within yourself?** Self-love is a daily journey. Your relationship with your body is so deeply personal, and then in this industry, it gets objectified. That's a really hard thing to balance in a very weird dichotomy. I think the main thing is truly letting my body be what it is, and not feeling like I need to make it what other people want it to be. So: being honest or being upfront about weight fluctuation! It happens. I think truly that sexy is being confident in your own skin and whatever that means to you. That's something that I've had to preach back at myself as well. Because I think that that's what shows, especially on-screen.

● **What are the biggest lessons you've learned since "Outer Banks" changed your life?** Calm down and embrace everything — good and bad, highs and lows. All of it is very informative. The best thing you can do is just get out and go experience things and live. And don't compare yourself.

Things you didn't know about Madelyn Cline

→

Age: 25

Hometown: Goose Creek, S.C.

Tall in the saddle: She loves horseback riding and used to work at a barn.

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